

OUR LIVING POETS
AN ESSAY IN CRITICISM

FORMAN, H.

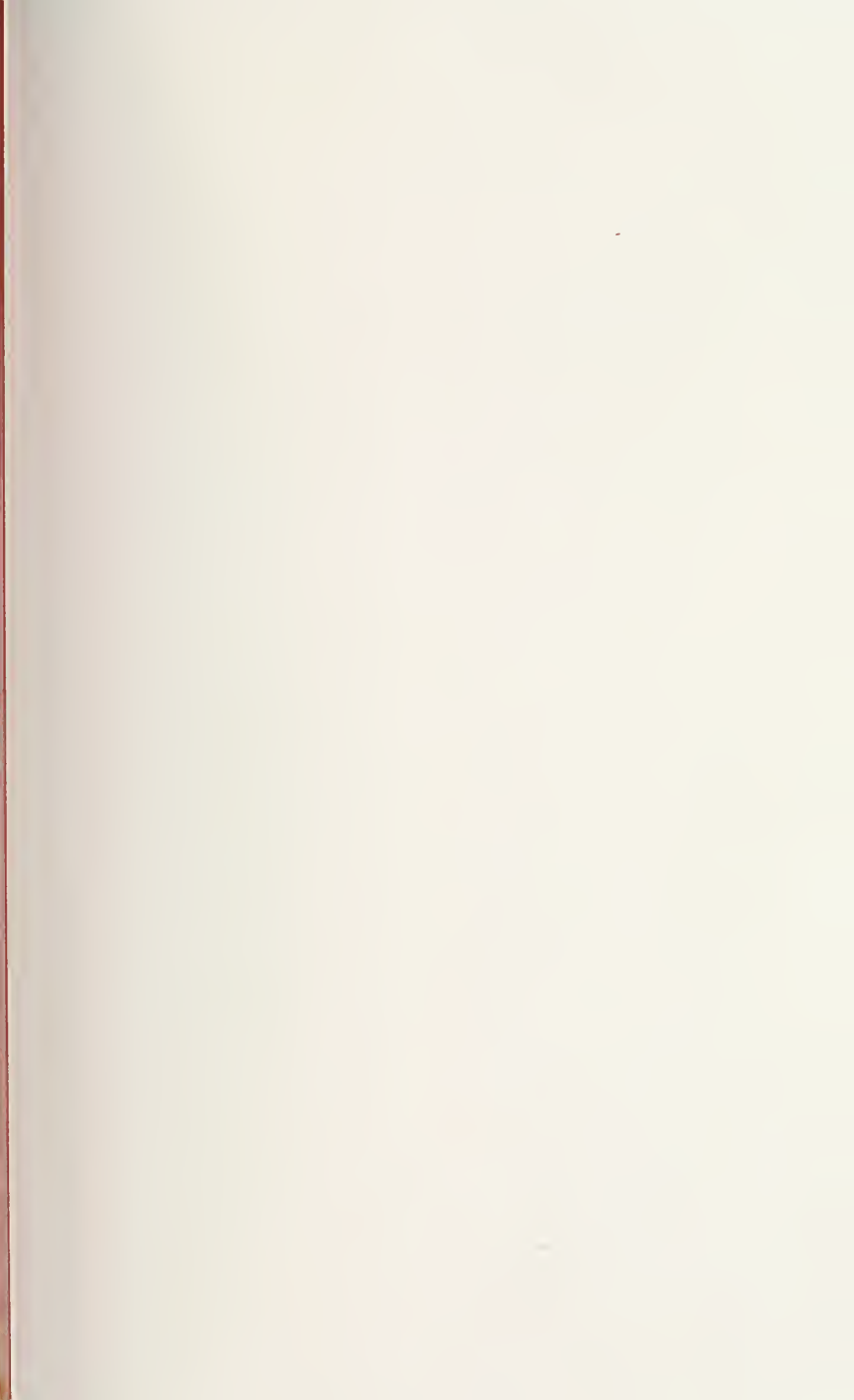


Reprinted on Demand
by

University
Microfilms
International

Ann Arbor • London





**This is an authorized facsimile
printed by microfilm/xerography on acid-free paper
in 1984 by
UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS INTERNATIONAL
Ann Arbor, Michigan, U.S.A.**

OUR LIVING POETS

AN ESSAY IN CRITICISM

: BY

H. BUXTON FORMAN

LONDON

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST., STRAND

1871

[All rights reserved]

PR
593
F7
1871a

PR
593
F7
1871a

1/10/00 1/100

541

8/6

E. Orton

LONDON:
BOBSON AND SONS, PRINTERS, FANCEAS ROAD, N.W.

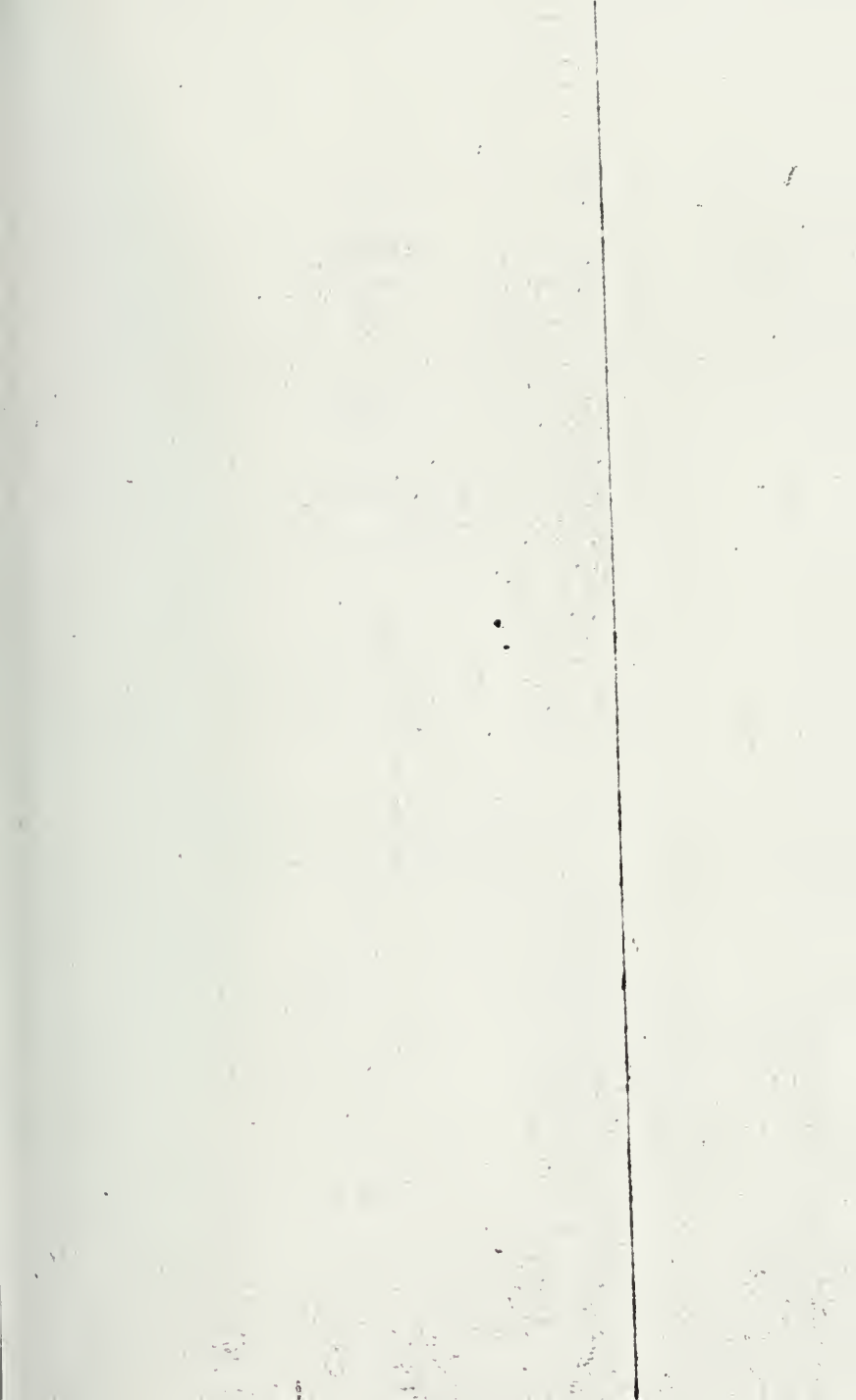
Jan. 12, 20,
80. 6d.
English.

TO
LAURA BUXTON FORMAN

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

BY
HER HUSBAND.

PR 1593
F7



**Reproduced by
DUOPAGE PROCESS
in the
U.S. of America .**

**Micro Photo Division
Bell & Howell Company
Cleveland 12, Ohio**



PREFATORY NOTE.

A LARGE proportion of this volume has already appeared in TINSLEYS' MAGAZINE and the LONDON QUARTERLY REVIEW; and a few pages of it have been published in the FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW. During the last four years I have had in mind the design of making the works of our living poets the subject of a comprehensive and connected study; and by putting forth from time to time such sections of my projected essay as could be readily adapted to the needs of current review and criticism, I have been enabled to see my way more clearly to the completion of the design with such unity as a work on so composite a subject could take in my hands. The whole has now been carefully revised with the aim of harmonising, rejecting what appeared to be of mere temporary interest, and adding such matters as might seem needful: thus every section contains more or less that has not been published till now, and several sections are entirely new.

H. B. F.

38 Marlborough Hill, St. John's Wood,
May 1871.



CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1

IDYLLIC SCHOOL.

ALFRED TENNYSON	27
MENELLA BUTE SMEDLEY	71
JEAN INGELOW	87

PSYCHOLOGICAL SCHOOL.

ROBERT BROWNING	103
WILLIAM W. STORY	153
AUGUSTA WEBSTER	169

PRERAPHAELITE GROUP.

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI	185
CHRISTINA GABRIELA ROSSETTI	229
COVENTRY PATMORE	255
THOMAS WOOLNER	273
WILLIAM BELL SCOTT	287

RENAISSANCE GROUP.

	PAGE
MATTHEW ARNOLD	309
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE	333
WILLIAM MORRIS	375
RICHARD HENRY HORNE	427
HENRY TAYLOR	447
GEORGE ELIOT	467

APPENDIX.

JOHN PAYNE AND ARTHUR W. E. O'SHAUGHNESSY . .	501
---	-----

INTRODUCTION.

Births have brought us richness and variety,
And other births will bring us richness and variety.
I do not call one greater and one smaller ;
That which fills its period and place is equal to any.'

WALT WHITMAN.

OUR LIVING POETS.

INTRODUCTION.

THE present age has been accused of being prosaïc and lacking romance—of unfitness for the development of anything truly great in art. The charge is easy to make, but hard to sustain: it is true that none of the arts as seen in this country at present are greatly coherent, in the sense in which Greek sculpture, mediæval Italian painting, modern German music, have been coherent. The art in which the English have excelled for centuries, the art of arts, Poetry, does not, it is true, present at this day that compact appearance that the Elizabethan drama got from a national coherence of sentiment and habit. Still the æsthetic in Man is probably as strong now in this country as it ever was in any other age and place, though, from the lack of a universal ideal of

life, the ideal in art is special to each great artist. This comes from the disintegration of society that has gone on a long while,—breaking and breaking old ideas and institutions and forms of thought; and the social upbuilding is yet to do.

A late phase of iconoclasm took its very highest expression in the works of Shelley and Byron; and the present race of poets are the legitimate and unmistakable successors of these, and to some extent also of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Looked at broadly, much of the work in verse of the present day presents the double aspect of reaction and outgrowth,—reaction from what was merely negative in those two great spirits, as well as from a false theory of art that carried poetry too exclusively into realms of a rare and unnatural atmosphere; and outgrowth from what these two, and the other two named, really accomplished of solid foundation-laying in regard to method—especially lyric method. Thus it comes about that the very instruments of verse invented, improved, or perfected by the last generation of great poets, and used by them for one purpose, have been taken up and modified in many instances and ways,—sometimes to assist in the reëmployment of traditions long antecedent to those demolished by the former workmen, sometimes for the building up of new traditions on the ruins which those workmen made.

With the exception of Mr. Swinburne, in his recent works, we have now no poets loudly and enthusiastically demanding social reconstruction, or indicating the means thereto. Nor is it easy to say what in this behalf might be done by a temperate and consistent direction of the poetic energy of the day; for there is unquestionably a huge appetite abroad for art-work, and for much that should be art-work and is not. The greatest demand is for literary art; and it is unlikely that artists, good, bad, and indifferent, were ever more plentiful. An extraordinary amount of poetry of one kind and another is being produced. If we look critically at the literary history of the past few years in this country, there can be no doubt that we are in the midst of an epoch of no small splendour. It is not merely that we have a goodly show of noble and original works accomplished, but also that the labours and perceptions of some two or three workers have marked out broadly a course for minor workers to follow up—filling in their smaller details to the grand edifice, as the school of Flemish painters contemporary with Rubens filled in around the outlines of his upbuilding the superb, but *less* superb, contributions which it was given them to bring to the great edifice of Flemish painting of the seventeenth century.

Nor is this all; for, if we were to go carefully into the popular-novel movement of the last few de-

cares, we should find a very large share of what is properly poetic energy poured away into pages of work that cannot possibly survive the rush of these times of impetuous production. Some of the novels of the day cannot go with the rest: they must stand as long as the language stands; and, while we are content to merely note that the vast artistic energy of the last two generations has been to a great extent wasted into channels that lead to oblivion, the fact that such energy has existed seems to call for some few remarks on the lines held to separate prose and verse; and this seems more particularly desirable on the ground that some of the authors to be discussed in these pages have used both methods of expression in a manner at least noteworthy.

Whatever may be the ulterior objects of individual artists, there is no doubt that, of all true art of whatever class, the universal motive is idealisation, the universal function expression. At first sight it might appear that, as perfection in each domain must be the end kept in view by every true artist, the relative importance of idealisation and expression is a fixed quantity throughout the esthetic scale; but careful consideration will show that this is not the case, and that, as the arts become more technical in their methods, expression rises in importance while it increases in difficulty; so that, whereas a poem abounding in beauties of sentiment,

thought, situation, or teaching, but deficient in magnificence of style, is a valuable thing, a painting finely conceived but ill-drawn or ill-coloured is simply unbearable. While music, painting, sculpture, and architecture, speak in special languages demanding special culture even for initiation, poetry holds the supreme advantage that its language is ordinary language idealised; and this is why, in literary art, the grand difficulty is to know precisely how, when, and where prose ends and poetry begins. The essence of the painter's art cannot be shown forth in any degree except pictorially, inasmuch as there is no dispensing with form and colour; but one essence of the poet's art may be shown forth in prose, though in the matter of external form we could not, of course, *confound* prose with poetry. Obviously this much will not be admitted by those who consider that versification and rhyme constitute the essence of poetry (a class, happily, almost obsolete); but whoever admits the starting proposition, that the one grand motive of art is idealisation, must also admit that a work (even in prose) which idealises thought, fact, situation, moral, &c., is poetical to a certain extent. All true works of art, it may be replied, are poetical to a certain extent; and so they doubtless are; but a prose work of art is poetical to this certain extent, not only in motive, but also in expression; for, though versification and some other me-

thods of poetry are necessarily avoided, the most indispensable of the poet's instruments, idealised language, is largely made use of.

Of the recognised *technique* of poetry, the greater number of constituents are within the reach of an able artist in prose, without departure from the prose method; but there are two which cannot be used without departure from that method, and which nevertheless do not of themselves stamp as a poem a work executed in the poetic form: these are rhyme and metre. There is a third which usually is not adopted in prose, the process of 'translating to our purposes' words already current, by giving them a new and special shade of meaning—a process best characterised as the *polarisation of language*.* Now it is

* Since this passage was published (some years ago), my attention has been called by a friend to the fact that the 'polarisation of words' is a term used in *The Professor at the Breakfast Table*,—a book which I blush to say I have never read. I have always considered that, for whatever might be fresh in the views put forth in the text, I was indebted to the suggestions of a very suggestive passage in Thomas Hobbes's *Answer to the Preface to Gondibert*. As the paragraph referred to is a very interesting piece of early abstract criticism, I extract it:—

'From *knowing much*, proceedeth the admirable variety and novelty of metaphors and similitudes, which are not possible to be lighted on in the compass of a narrow knowledge. And the want whereof compelleth a writer to expressions that are either defaced by time, or sullied with vulgar or long use. For the phrases of poesy, as the airs of music, with often hearing become insipid; the reader having no more sense of their force, than our flesh is sensible of the bones that sustain it. As the sense we have of bodies, consisteth in change of variety of impression, so also does the sense of language in the variety and changeable use of words. I mean not in the affectation of words newly brought home from

this process which gives the key-note to the most important difference between the prose and poetic methods; for, as the poet leaves to the imagination an immense deal of the *matter* of his work which the artist in prose would detail, so his individual ideas are frequently indicated by a subtle polarisation of a word where a prose artist would use a periphrasis to convey his meaning. And this polarisation is the

travel, but in new, and withal significant, translation to our purposes, of those that be already received; and in far-fetched, but withal, apt, instructive, and comely similitudes' (Hobbes's English Works, ed. Molesworth, vol. iv. p. 455).

Since my attention was called to the 'Professor's' passage on polarised words I have made a point of consulting his book; and it seems to me that I must certainly be indebted to him for that particular use of the scientific term 'polarised' which I have adopted in the text, and thought I had originated. Here is the passage in which the 'Professor' uses the word:—

'When a given symbol which represents a thought has lain for a certain length of time in the mind, it undergoes a change like that which rest in a certain position gives to iron. It becomes magnetic in its relations;—it is traversed by strange forces which did not belong to it. The word, and consequently the idea it represents, is *polarised*.

'The religious currency of mankind, in thought, in speech, and in print, consists entirely of polarised words. Borrow one of these from another language and religion; and you will find it leaves all its magnetism behind it. Take that famous word O'm of the Hindoo mythology. Even a priest cannot pronounce it without sin; and a holy pundit would shut his ears and run away from you in horror, if you should say it aloud. What do you care for O'm? If you wanted to get the pundit to look at his religion fairly, you must first depolarise this and all similar words for him.'

The word is used here in a more strictly correct sense than that in which I use it: it refers here to an unconscious change; but I use it in an active transitive sense to designate a conscious mental act.

most extreme form of the very soul of the poetic method, as technically distinguished from the prose method—that condensed presentation of thought which leaves a large matter impressed on the mind by a very small number of happily-assorted words. Periphrasis being in perfect keeping with the whole method of prose, the prose artist but seldom produces passages of a few words to be remembered perforce in this way, but usually conveys the choice idea by means of a considerably larger number of happily-assorted words. He is never called upon to polarise language, or to condense it to a greater degree than an ambitious essayist, for instance, would do. Indeed this artifice of polarisation, though one of the chief technical beauties of poetry, would be something of a fault in prose, and would not be understood by the public or tolerated by critics of workmanship. Moreover, while it is not difficult to catch the mechanical trick of writing in rhythm or rhyme, to obtain this polarising and condensing faculty is most difficult,—necessitating, in an habitual prose writer, a radical change in the habit of mind not likely to be compassed successfully by the artificial means of study. It is a faculty implying intense originality in the possessor's manner of thought, and a *minimum* of imitation; but it is possible to have matter written in verse that shall be almost pure prose (even though choice prose), and that simply from its want of con-

densation. When we say of a prose author, as we sometimes do, 'he is quite a poet,' we do not mean that his periods are rhythmic—we make no allusion to the form of his work; but we imply that he thinks and feels as a poet, and that his language is individual and remarkable for chastity, vigour, sweetness, or any other *desideratum* of artists. On the other hand, when we say of a verse-monger that he is prosy, we do not mean that his productions lack jingle or beat, but that he feels commonplace feelings, thinks commonplace thoughts, and utters both in commonplace language. So that what we find in the one and miss in the other is pointed at in these two popular phrases as the important and distinctive attribute of the poet—mere method being left quite in the background.

Not for a moment must one overlook the fact that, in the transition to rhythm from the unrhythmic, language acquires a certain *afflatus* independent of signification. All that it is desired to insist on is that neither this *afflatus* nor the musical beauty of sound suffices to distinguish a poet's productions from those of other minds, and that his distinction tallies with the measure of his success in effecting noble idealisations without transgression of the limits within which language may be woven into works of beauty. If any other criterion were set up, we should have a discussion as to the relative merits of blank-

verse poems and lyrics; for, on the one hand, there is nowhere so stately and sustained an *afflatus* as in fine blank verse, and, on the other hand, many of the lyrical effects of Shelley, of Tennyson, of Swinburne, of Rossetti, are more musical than any blank verse could possibly be. Such a discussion would be obviously absurd; and it seems to me that there is only one remove from this in point of absurdity, in attempting to draw a strict line of superiority and inferiority between the prose and poetic methods of esthetic expression.

The mental faculty which enables the artist to idealise, is perhaps best described as *imagination*—the creation of images; and the methods chosen to convey these images outward to the world all come under the head of *expression*, and are of course intimately dependent on the idiosyncrasies of individual minds. Perfection in the artist's ideal must always be the first *desideratum*; but the greater the perfection with which that ideal takes form, in whatever manner of art, the greater and wider will be the influence, and the more vivid the delight to all classes who receive the work.

But, however splendid and great be the style or way of saying things, it is not that alone, or that mainly even, that endears noble art-work to large circles of readers: what does this most unfailingly is the true artist's unlimited sympathy with all animate

and inanimate nature, shown in the exquisite sense of the beautiful *minutiae* of scenery as well as of its large effects, and in rejoicing with the great and small joys of great and small people, sorrowing over the large and little sorrows of the lofty and lowly, drawing near with infinite loving pity to the erring, whether in petty weaknesses or grave sad crimes. These universal sympathies are what go to make up a noble and wholesome ideal of life, such as all true artists possess individually to a greater or less extent; and this ideal of life, coupled with a fine imagination, brings forth such fruit of idealisation in art as no other combination of qualities avails for. This large sympathy adequately expressed is the attribute of great poets, and the most endearing of their attributes. It is this that makes Shakespeare the king he is over the hearts of men, and it is this that makes the name of Elizabeth Barrett Browning still sweet and grateful on the lips of all who have known her as a poetess, however conscious they may be of the shortcomings and sins of her style. This it is, too, that unfailingly seizes on any mind which places itself in contact with that strange great gospel of Walt Whitman's,—where, perhaps, it is found in the intensest form it has ever yet taken. Mere sympathy, however universal, does not make an artist unless there be also the power of expressing it; and, on the other hand, no amount of wordy ability will enable a

man to express what is not in him—what he has not felt at all events deeply enough to conceive some other person as feeling. But it is very doubtful whether there is such a thing as this great beautiful sympathy without the power of expression in some adequate degree. The expression may be perfect, or it may be faulty; and, technically, a man will be judged according to his success in expression; but the strong probability is that whatever of this greatness of soul is in a man will find its way out in some sort or another, and go to work in the world in form more or less artistic. Sympathy implies expansiveness, and expansiveness implies action—of which artistic exposition is perhaps the most intense form.

These thoughts lead by a very natural transition to the vexed question how far poetry may be ‘an offence to religion and morality,’ and yet claim exemption from attack on any ground but that of bad workmanship; and, as immunities from attack on the score of moral offence have been claimed at no remote date by one of our principal living poets, it becomes a primary need for the critical conscience to settle, at all events for the critic’s own satisfaction and guidance, the bearings of the momentous question. Surely one may in fairness ask, ‘On what ground is a poet, more than another artist, or even another man, to claim exemption from attack when

he commits such offences?' Were the *Lascivie* of Giulio Romano unjustly suppressed because they were executed with the combined mastership of a Giulio Romano and a Marcantonio Raimondi? Should the police have orders to allow the exposure for sale of Holywell-street *Lascivie*, provided they be faultless in production? Every poet would surely answer 'No' to both these questions: and, if so, on what possible grounds can a lascivious work of art claim to be exempted from molestation because the materials with which it is produced are mere language, instead of shapes and hues? Indeed, if one class of artists is more responsible than another for offences against morality, poets are that class; for they paint in a language which all can understand, and address themselves to a wider audience than is commanded by any other set of artists. There stand the two elements in every work of art; and it is just to hold that it is the critic's business to appraise both;—first the ideal kept in view by the artist while producing, and secondly the amount of perfection attained in working towards that ideal. Why do we expel from among us Dutch paintings of boors in bestial revelry of lust and drunkenness, or St. Anthonies undergoing temptations and persecutions, depicted without regard to any sense of propriety or decency? Not usually because they are ill painted: they are frequently painted far better than glorious

saints and Madonnas of the early Italians, which any curator of a public gallery would be only too glad to acquire at large prices. If we merely desired perfection of manipulation, we should accept the Dutch abominations with hearts full of thankfulness; but we reject them because the ideal, realised in them with entire success, is low and beastly—is an offence to religion—morality—decency—whatever you please to call it.

The mission of Art is before all things a beneficent one. She has been from time immemorial a handmaiden to the religions and moralities of the various times and places through which her protean transformations have been flashed since the commencement of history. The main bulk of valued art-product has always been that most in accordance with the spirit of its time—most helpful and grateful to the general mind of the age; and a very important consideration in appraising an artist's ideal is—'What degree of correspondence has it with the contemporary manners and feelings?' Art never becomes separated from human interests; and the interests with which it is most intimately blended are obviously those of contemporary humanity. Should we tolerate a Catullus now, however exquisitely he hymned his uncongenial objects of worship? No! Witness the fate of *Little's Poems*, even when Moore wrote them. Conceive an early Christian poet vent-

ing his rhymes to a polytheistic community: he would of course be hooted down at once; not because his periods were bad or his language poor, but because he prated of things unseemly to polytheistic ears—or, as Mr. Swinburne phrases it, ‘under the impertinent and irrelevant plea that his work was an affliction or an offence to religion and morality.’ And so it will always be: a poet may ‘trundle back his soul five hundred years,’ without meeting with anything like opprobrium, so long as he does not happen to trundle it on to matter offensive to the religious or moral sentiment of his contemporaries; but let him stir up any antique mud and offer it as valid art-ware, and he will find that there are plenty of honest critics ready to dare the charge of impertinence and irrelevance for the sake of protesting against such breach of good feeling and propriety.

When one talks of offences against the religion and morality of the age, it is not of course intended to refer to the actual intensity of religious or moral sense in individuals, because we shall always find that there are plenty of people who commit, almost without shame, deeds which the general voice of the time would condemn uncompromisingly. In morality, as elsewhere, there is a grave distinction between the abstract and the concrete; and when an artist selects for treatment a subject of which critics

are unanimous in proclaiming the age's condemnation, the verdict is founded, not on the fact that no one is so depraved as to enjoy the work of art, but on the unassailable consideration that the subject would, according to the generally accepted ideas upon morality and propriety, be held unfit for the mind to dwell on with pleasure. Probably no one is so Utopian as to suppose that there are not plenty of specimens of 'villanous man' ready to revel in all that is base; but these are the hideous lower *stratum* of human nature that has always existed—the ugly frayed edges of humanity that no shears of civilisation have availed to trim off. If they have been unable to work their minds up to the level of their age, and must needs have works of art to batten on such as passed for wholesome food under a grosser system, let them go back and unburrow filth for themselves from among the works of the artists congenial to that grosser period: do not let the esthetic minds of the present day take part in the degradation by producing for them, in a modern garb, matter to gratify their lawless appetites. The artist who does this lays himself open to attack on the score of falsity and impropriety in his ideal; and he has no right to say his assailants are attacking the man, not the artist—for the flaws in his work are as much artistic flaws, if detected in the ideal towards which the elements of his product are made

/

to converge, as if they were found in the convergent elements themselves.

It now remains to explain the order of precedence adopted in the following pages in treating of our living poets; and this point necessitates a few words on the schools of poetry forming or formed among us. First, then, what is a school in Art? In regard to painting, the term 'school' has more than one signification: sometimes it refers simply to some great artist and to the immediate group of his pupils or imitators, and at other times it is used to designate a much wider circle of workers as regards both time and place. When we talk of the School of Giotto, we refer usually to Giotto's supreme self and the painters immediately under his influence; and similarly, when we name the Eclectic School of Bologna, we intend to take in merely the Caracci and their immediate followers. On the other hand, when people talk of the 'Dutch School,' they make use of a very loose and vague term, and mass together subjectively a number of works of as infinite variety in their 'poor degree' as those they would mass together in talking broadly of the 'Italian School.' But in poetry the term is not quite so vague in its possibilities of application. Every one knows what is meant by the Elizabethan School of Dramatists, because the term has an historical association universally familiar; and the term 'Satirists of the Restora-

tion' is only more vague in proportion to the more ephemeral interest of the subjects treated by that school, the lower rank taken by formal satire in relation to that taken by the drama, and the smaller calibre of the men making up the school. But when we talk of the Idyllic, Psychological, and Præraphaelite Schools of modern English Poetry, it is but vaguely felt in the larger number of minds that one term at all events includes Tennyson, while each of the others indicates some other person or persons unknown. And yet the prospects of English poetic literature (as separated from prose literature) are probably shut up within those vaguely-understood terms.

When we talk of the Idyllic School, we use the word 'school' in a sense very nearly identical with that in which we use it in talking of schools bygone, because there are actually in existence many writers who have imitated the style of certain of Tennyson's works with sufficient accuracy to make it obvious in what groove their metric faculty has been induced to flow. We take up publication after publication, and find, dotted about, poems obviously of the school of *Dora*, *The Gardener's Daughter*, *The Brook*, *Sea Dreams*, &c.; and, while Tennyson's idyllic pieces are so superb in workmanship that they must always stand out boldly from among the multitude of less costly things to which they have

given birth, their method is yet sufficiently easy of imitation to insure a respectable following of works to be sought out and studied for some generations.

In naming the Psychological School of poetry, the issues opened up are much more complex, and therefore more vague. The great leader, Browning, has followed a course so strikingly original, that near imitations of him would be excessively difficult to effect, — a course so little popular that such imitations, even if practicable, have been uninduced by the market considerations which of themselves must have sufficed to furnish innumerable aspirants to Tennysonian imitation. At the same time there is scarcely a poet of mark now among us in whose works the influence of Browning may not be clearly discerned. We have, besides this dispersed influence, some few volumes which, while distinctly good and original, are just as distinctly to be affiliated on the innovations of Browning's genius, though they have not the same distinct flavour of imitation that characterises work by some of Tennyson's followers.

The Preraphaelite poetry, mainly characterised by its rupture with convention for the sake of returning to nature, and, to come to matters of detail, by its attempt to approach, more nearly than other poets have approached, the actualities of language, dialogue, &c., may be traced in a large number of poetical works. By far the best poet of the group

is its founder, Mr. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in much of whose work the Preraphaelite ideal finds a full expression, but who has been preserved by his absolute quality of poet (whether of this or of that order) from carrying a theory to the extremes reached by some of his followers. The same may be said of Miss Christina Rossetti, in whose works Preraphaelitism is found in its integrity, but not in its extremeness. But in Mr. Woolner's earlier work the ideal is brought to extremes of rugged simplicity, —though, by the time he came to publish *My Beautiful Lady* as a book, his years had given him too much taste to indulge in extremes. Mr. Coventry Patmore, on the other hand, started better than he has been able to go on; and in him the strife after actualities has reached the utmost sublimity of commonplace.

It has been asserted that the present prospects of English poetic literature are probably shut within the limits of the Idyllic, Psychological, and Preraphaelite Schools, not with the view of denying a high place to any productions which do not come within the strict meaning of those terms, but simply as an expression of the fact that those schools include what is essentially characteristic of the present era of poetry—what is as new from a technical point of view as is the present form of novel, when, in consummate hands, its idealisations are compassed by means of a

balance of dramatisation, description, and analysis unattempted by the earlier workers in fiction. The innovations of the schools in question, equally with those of the new order of fiction, are not merely superficial, but involve quite new principles in the technical procedures of literature, thus opening up fresh possibilities to future workers ; but this is no detriment whatever to the many excellent modes of procedure of earlier date, nor to any honest labourers who may find themselves, by natural idiosyncrasies of mind, *au fait* at some older method, while perhaps quite at sea in any attempt at working in the new methods.

Besides the amount of poetry of varied quality classifiable under these heads, we have a great deal of what may be called Renaissance poetry, also of various qualities ; and this Renaissance poetry must, in the main, be judged purely on its own merits, without reference to possible effects on future poets. The Idyllic and Psychological Schools, on the other hand, are so wholly and intimately connected with modern ideas, as also is one aspect of the Præraphaelite order of work, that their traditions are doubtless destined to a continuation in the hands of followers. From this point of view the Idyllic School is valuable by virtue of the method developed in the treatment of contemporary subjects otherwise than dramatically—the faculty of making exquisite narra-

tive pictures of our middle-class life in its more simple phases; and the Psychological School has a wide applicability to the idealisation of the intellectual and emotional phases of being which, in modern city life, are so intensified as to preponderate immensely in importance over the life of physical activity; while Preraphaelitism has blended exquisite work and fine thought, medieval intensity of beauty-worship and modern naturalism, in the treatment of high themes both medieval and contemporary.

Thus, in arranging this volume, the three compact schools of poetry have naturally been placed first; and precedence is given to the Laureate, not from any desire to distinguish him as the foremost of our poets, but because, as a matter of history, he made his anonymous *début* six years before the Psychological School was founded anonymously by Browning, and long before Preraphaelitism had begun to assert itself under that designation. The Laureate's name is of course followed by those of his two most popular imitators—Miss Ingelow and Miss Smedley; and similarly Browning's name, which comes next, is followed by those of Mr. Story and Mrs. Webster. Mr. D. G. Rossetti's name, again, is followed by that of Miss Christina Rossetti, the best disciple who has studied under him consistently and yet not slavishly; and then come the names of two other genuine children of the Preraphaelite move-

ment, Mr. Patmore and Mr. Woolner. Mr. W. B. Scott completes the group, while standing partly isolated from it on the ground of a strong preëxistence.

Of the six poets whose names come last, Mr. Arnold, Mr. Swinburne, Mr. Morris, Mr. Horne, Sir H. Taylor, and George Eliot—composing what for want of any better general designation may be called the Renaissance Group—only three are unmistakably Renaissance poets by virtue of the whole bulk of their best works, namely Mr. Morris, Mr. Horne, and Sir Henry Taylor; and the order in which that portion of the volume has been arranged requires a little explanation. Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Morris having both been profoundly influenced at first by Mr. Rossetti, and being the obvious historic successors to the Preraphaelite group, their names might naturally have been looked for after the names in that group. But I conceive Mr. Arnold's right place is really between the Preraphaelites and Mr. Swinburne, because this disciple of Wordsworth has certain strong affinities with Mr. Rossetti and his school, and because he also certainly had some weight in directing the mind of the author of *Atalanta in Calydon*. There is a further reason for the order in which these six names are placed: the three great literatures more or less revived in our noble collection of Renaissance poetry are the Greek Drama, the Medieval Romance, and the Elizabethan Drama; and thus Mr. Arnold and

Mr. Swinburne, as writers of neo-Greek plays, should come before Mr. Morris, whose poems represent the Medieval Romance, and can only be called 'of the School of Chaucer,' although his intrinsic qualities of poet place him on an equal footing with his great prototype. For like reasons Mr. Morris, though his works do not date so far back as Mr. Horne's and Sir Henry Taylor's do, precedes those poets here as the Medieval Romance precedes historically the Elizabethan Drama. The name of George Eliot ends the list because she also, in poetic style though not in dramatic method, assimilates the Elizabethan dramatists; and there also seemed to be some fitness in making her works the ultimate theme, because they form a climax of great modern thought and noble feeling, while the incomplete development of her verse-powers suggests transition to another sphere of art than that sphere here discussed. And here I would emphatically state that the term 'Renaissance-poet' as applied to these six authors has not the slightest implication of obsolescence or of subordinate rank. For my views on the several poets I must be content to refer to the various sections of this essay—wherein it will be readily seen that such works as *Atalanta in Calydon*, *The Life and Death of Jason*, *Cosmo de' Medici*, and *The Spanish Gypsy* are not represented as ranking one jot less high on account of any imputed kinship to the respective literatures

that have helped to furnish them forth with those garments of word-work and form-construction always handed on from literature to literature, and never likely to be let die, by successive generations of great poets, for the vulgar sake of being uniformly and uncompromisingly original. Indeed this last group of poets embody some of the most extreme modern characteristics of our current poetic literature; and nothing that can be said here will convey to the reader as clearly as will the several sections that follow, how entirely I accept, as the natural and proper outcome of this composite phase of social existence, the composite literature here discussed, of which no one man's labours seem to be other than a portion of a great design.



I.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

'Honey of the heart
Was ever in his gift; imaginings
Of purity were ever round him.'

W. B. SCOTT.

'Sing again, with thy sweet voice revealing
A tone
Of some world far from ours,
Where music and moonlight and feeling
Are one.'

SHELLEY.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

THERE is probably no one alive at the present moment to whom we are more indebted than we are to our Poet Laureate for good influences exerted in the field of Literature. Among the over-censorious there has lately come up a fashion of ignoring the magnitude of his claims because of the falling-off which it is impossible not to recognise in much of his later work; but whatever he may do or leave undone, nothing can annul or even overshadow, to just eyesights, the great claim he has on our gratitude on some very important heads: in the sphere of thought, looked at apart from that of singing, he has done much to help forward the liberal and large view of things in contradistinction to the conservative and small; he has done so at once without a shadow of repulsive violence and without a suspicion of servile taciturnity; he has put forward ideas on various matters of life and thought in a tone at once manly and refined; and he has created noble and original models of language, looked at merely as language,

without regard to its being cast in the high form of perfect verse. Following Shelley and Coleridge, it was no light task for him to push poetic thought forward, and to carry poetic form into new regions of lyric beauty. But both he has done; and we have a long series of works bearing more or less of testimony to this fact. The time has gone by for noting how lyric forms of English Poetry first got in Tennyson's hands a tensility and perfect symmetry of growth absent from earlier work, and that too without any great sacrifice of those flower-like qualities of poetic art wherein Shelley and Coleridge so largely excelled. It is late in the day for noting even how a lyric sweetness and variety—a *singing* variety—was first conferred on blank verse, as in *Tears, idle Tears*, by this first and greatest of workers in verbal mosaic; and it is almost too late to offer remarks upon the perfect equipoise of parts attained by him in those small sweet narratives which he has chosen to call *idylls*, and which will now always be known by that not quite appropriate name.

Most of Tennyson's best work has been, and still is pretty generally, appreciated to the full; and nearly all the good things a critic can say about them have probably been said over and over again; but, without passing in review over the bulk of his labours, there may still be room for a word on one or two that seem barely appreciated at their due worth, either in

relation to the poet's own works or in relation to work by other hands; and a word of dissatisfaction is at this time more than ever called for on what an American newspaper happily termed the 'lapse of the Laureate.'

The two principal poems not quite appreciated to the height of their value are *In Memoriam* and *Maud*. It may seem an impertinence to assert this; because by those who love art for art's sake *Maud* is doubtless highly cherished, while to all intellectual lovers of verse *In Memoriam* is a book among the dearest. For the poetry-reading public in general, however, these works are more or less overshadowed by the immense and undue popularity of the so-called *Idylls of the King*.

In Memoriam is usually, as far as one can learn, regarded as no more than a collection of lyrics in one metre, admitted to hold a wide variety of thought and expression, but not seen as a single chiselled masterpiece with a vital *oneness* connecting all its parts. I have known it gravely advanced that this *oneness* consists in a mere study of certain conceived phases of human thought and passion, with the consequent coldness of a mere study; but it is hard to relinquish, when once conceived, the idea that the poem gives expression to the sequent phases of a genuine passion felt by one man towards another separated from him by death; and the fact that high

art has been brought to the rendering of this diary of a forlorn passion into a noble form only adds to the psychic value of the result. That Shakespeare's sonnets had been studied by Tennyson near about the time of this work's production, there can be no doubt; and it is probable that a reasonable emulation induced the Laureate to elaborate with combined vigour and chastity the idea of a man's passion for a man, which the supreme poet is usually held to have elaborated with vigour unaccompanied by chastity: still it should seem that this emulation would merely follow the fact that the Laureate's conceptions exceed Shakespeare's in chastity. In a word, *In Memoriam* seems to claim eternal regard not as a *tour de force*, but as a real outbreathing of fine human nature, elaborated to the height of high art. The work is solemn and weighty throughout;—has no taint of that reckless pride in strength that a mere *tour de force* inevitably shows, and breathes a deep tenderness of soul from its very lightest sections. If there is one section which, more than others, might be held to want evidence of real feeling, it is the seventy-sixth. It might be thought indicative of slightness in a mourner to speculate as to the fate of his love-lyrics, as thus:—

‘What hope is here for modern rhyme
To him, who turns a musing eye
On songs, and deeds, and lives, that lie
Foreshorten'd in the tract of time?

These mortal lullabies of pain
May bind a book, may line a box,
May serve to curl a maiden's locks;
Or when a thousand moons shall wane,

A man upon a stall may find,
And, passing, turn the page that tells
A grief, then changed to something else,
Sung by a long-forgotten mind.'

But to me this seems to be the natural morbid suggestion of a poet's grief; for how can a poet put away from him the knowledge that men are to read what he writes? He naturally desires to impart as largely as possible the beautiful grief he has tenderly nursed; and yet half the beauty of the grief would be gone in this case, if we were not assured perforce of the genuine love for the mere utterance of it, expressed in the fourth and final stanza of the section just quoted:

'But what of that? My darken'd ways
Shall ring with music all the same;
To breathe my loss is more than fame,
To utter love more sweet than praise.'

The great value of *Maud* rests first on the fact that it is modern and progressive in idea, truly dramatic in principle, and quite original in its forms. It is unpopular simply because it assails the sluggish indifference of the Briton to anything disconnected from a lucrative peace; and the unpleasantness of the home-thrust probably blinded many eyes to the fresh vigour and male beauty of those memorable stanzas in the opening section:

'Peace sitting under her olive, and lurring the days gone by,
 When the poor are hovell'd and hustled together, each sex, like
 swine,
 When only the ledger lives, and when only not all men lie;
 Peace in her vineyard—yes!—but a company forges the wine.

And the vitriol madness flushes up in the ruffian's head,
 Till the filthy by-lane rings to the yell of the trampled wife,
 While chalk and alum and plaster are sold to the poor for bread,
 And the spirit of murder works in the very means of life.

And sleep must lie down arm'd, for the villainous centre-bits
 Grind on the wakeful ear in the hush of the moonless nights,
 While another is cheating the sick of a few last gasps, as he sits
 To pestle a poison'd poison behind his crimson lights.

When a Mammonite mother kills her babe for a burial fee,
 And Timour-Mammon grins on a pile of children's bones,
 Is it peace or war? better, war! loud war by land and by sea,
 War with a thousand battles, and shaking a hundred thrones.

For I trust if an enemy's fleet came yonder round by the hill,
 And the rushing battle-bolt sang from the three-decker out of
 the foam,
 That the smoothfaced snubnosed rogue would leap from his coun-
 ter and till,
 And strike, if he could, were it but with his cheating yard-wand,
 home.'

But to those who care to think, the Laureate will always have a large credit for the farsightedness of his (or rather of his spokesman's) political point of view in *Maud*; and to those who study form, that work will be ever precious as the foundation of new possibilities in metric beauty, and as a splendid realisation of those possibilities. It may be that the superb march and flow attained by Mr. Swinburne in his long anapaestic measures would have been got without *Maud's* assistance; but in literary annals the

fact must rest recorded that those measures first appeared in their perfection in some of the dramatic lyrics that go to make up this work, which is perhaps the Laureate's greatest. It is not easy to admire too much in *Maud* the elaborate conception in psychic dynamics carried out under the seemingly simple scheme of action, that is the most obvious thread of the poem. That the man who tells the tale should have loved a girl thought to be 'above him,' have shot her aggressive and insulting brother in a duel, have fled the country and gone mad, and finally have set out, after her death, to join in the Crimean campaign, does not make in itself much of a tale. The first admirable subtlety of the work is in the suppression of strong character in the man, whose father had got ruin and death as the only out-come of some money-making schemes, and who while hating and scorning the peace-at-any-price theory of his times, yet makes up his mind to keep from contamination by 'burying himself in his books,' and thus indulging in another form the selfishness he detests in the peace-worshipping age. And no less subtle is the mastery with which he is gradually forced out of his self-contained phase by an intense passion for Maud—a passion that liberates his soul so utterly from all bonds as to lead to that reckless act which breaks off all his relations with his country, and leads on to the total purging of his

mind in passing through extreme sorrow and even madness. How his passion gets transformed to a tender and genuine solicitude, in the time of his absence from Maud and ignorance concerning her fate, is depicted in a manner worthy of what has gone before; and no more lovely poetry can well be found than that section spoken on the Breton coast, and ending with the lines—

‘Am I guilty of blood?
However this may be,
Comfort her, comfort her, all things good,
While I am over the sea!
Let me and my passionate love go by,
But speak to her all things holy and high,
Whatever happen to me!
Me and my harmful love go by;
But come to her waking, find her asleep,
Powers of the height, Powers of the deep,
And comfort her tho’ I die.’

But perhaps the largest triumph in conception, as well as in execution, is that reserved for the close of the book, when the soul that has been chastened out of mere cynical isolation, out of an unbridled passion, to a stage of pure and unselfish love for another, attains the merge of self in the large life of a nation with whom he can at length find himself in unison. There is something of the sublime in the manner in which the man’s persecuting phantom—the ‘ghastly wraith’ of that love whose brother he has killed—still persists in dogging the man’s soul with reproach after he has developed the nobler personal love, and

only fades from him as he succeeds in throwing his personality into the uprising of his people in a vast cause. And it would be instructive to all poets even, of whatever degree, to note how, with the same anapaestic metre-stock, the last section's firm majestic sweeping cadence is contrasted with the first section's fervid invective and over-impetuosity of rhythm. But let the lines speak for themselves; I transcribe the third and fourth stanzas:

'And as months ran on and rumour of battle grew,
"It is time, it is time, O passionate heart," said I
(For I cleaved to a cause that I felt to be pure and true),
"It is time, O passionate heart and morbid eye,
That old hysterical mock-disease should die."
And I stood on a giant deck and mix'd my breath
With a loyal people shouting a battle cry,
Till I saw the dreary phantom arise and fly
Far into the north, and battle, and seas of death.

Let it go or stay, so I wake to the higher aims
Of a land that has lost for a little her lust of gold,
And love of a peace that was full of wrongs and shames,
Horrible, hateful, monstrous, not to be told;
And hail once more to the banner of battle unroll'd!
Tho' many a light shall darken, and many shall weep
For those that are crush'd in the clash of jarring claims,
Yet God's just wrath shall be wreak'd on a giant liar;
And many a darkness into the light shall leap,
And shine in the sudden making of splendid names,
And noble thought be freer under the sun,
And the heart of a people beat with one desire;
For the peace that I deem'd no peace is over and done,
And now by the side of the Black and the Baltic deep,
And deathful-grinning mouths of the fortress, flames
The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire.'

Beyond this, language-shaping in England has not yet gone.

Of these two great books, and of a large proportion of the poems now collected in one volume—that is to say of all the Laureate's labours up to the year 1855—it is not too much to say that an acquaintance and constant reperusal during many years only serves to yield fresh enjoyment and increased admiration.

Those of the Laureate's poems which are certain to hold real and permanent rank divide themselves into lyric, idyllic, and dramatic. As a poet influential, and likely to be influential, on other lesser poets, he takes position chiefly as idyllic and lyric: his strictly idyllic poems constitute a collection of models in a new and admirable method, suited well for modern purposes; but the idyllic method so perfectly used in *Dora*, so exquisitely modified in *The Brook* and *Sea Dreams*, appears to have escaped from all bounds in the so-called *Idylls of the King*, *Enoch Arden*, and *Aylmer's Field*, and to have run quite wild even in an earlier work, *The Princess*. In the lyric division of work the poet has made several perfect additions since 1855; and in the dramatic division some splendid results have been attained—the three most notable being *Tithonus*, *The Northern Farmer (Old Style)*, and *Lucretius*. The Laureate is hardly ever dramatic in the full sense of the word as applied to Shakespeare, Browning, or Horne; but the expression is here used to indicate those of his poems which are spoken wholly or mainly from other

mouths than his own, such as *Ænone*, *Ulysses*, *St. Simeon Stylites*, and *Maud*. In these there is a sustained strength and firmness of handling not seen in much of the later work, except the three dramatic poems named above. *Lucretius* will probably be considered one of the *chefs-d'œuvre* of the master as long as English poetry is read.

The historical materials of this poem are almost nothing; and it is noteworthy that no less than a monumental monologue should have been constructed from the vague legend that Lucretius committed suicide after having been maddened by means of a love-potion. Whether he did so or not is a question probably never to be decided; but round the slender thread of this tradition the poet has moulded and modelled the most beautiful of the theories of Lucretius, and worked them into a poem that must throw the greatest of the Tiber-side poets into a stronger relief than ever. The poet's range of subjects includes none or few more noble than this of erecting a worthy statue of a fellow-poet; and when that fellow-poet is one of whom but little is known absolutely, whose death, it is felt, *must* have been grand, though it is shrouded in mystery, to depict a fitting death-scene is more than ordinarily meritorious. A gross conception would have imaged Lucretius as simply the victim of a vulgar mania, committing suicide as any miserable, low-lived patient might do. But

the refined mind of the Laureate sees in the didactic poem *De Rerum Naturâ* stuff for no such slavish death. He knows Lucretius as 'gods know gods,' and construes the legend in full accordance with all that remains absolutely certain of the man—his great work. In that work he is a soldier in the cause of purity and truth; and Tennyson conceives him as utterly intolerant of himself when purity seems to have vanished from him, and truth has become obscure: once a soldier in the true cause, he will not desert, and he turns fiercely on the enemy of the cause, even if he himself be that enemy.

While some of the Laureate's works hold a lofty place from mere beauty of colour and sound, this poem takes rank among the best, not merely because the execution borders closely upon perfection, but because the thought worked out is beautiful and noble. The prosaic words 'maddened by a love-potion' are the germ of a vivid picture of the lofty Epicurean who, feeling himself the victim of base animal desires such as he loathed, could not consent to live, and, unconvinced of the truth of Plato's opinion as to suicide, ended his life by his own hand. This climax is brought on with great skill: the dire oppression of his feeling of degradation works him into a state of hallucination,—he is suddenly the victim of a waking vision—of a nymph running towards him chased by a satyr; and it is the reality

of this vision—the seemingly indelible impression of base thoughts on the brain of Lucretius—which overpowers him: the hideous indecision as to whether he desires or not the nearer approach of the nymph, the sense of suspected rivalry with a satyr,

‘Beastlier than any phantom of his kind
That ever butted his rough brother-brute
For lust or lusty blood or provender,’

culminates the self-detesting frenzy calling for self-destruction; and the will to die by his own hand brings comfort to the poet by reasserting to him his manhood; for, he asks,

‘What beast has heart to do it?’

The end of the speech is incomparably great, both as blank verse and as thought; it is, indeed, as rich in both respects as any work of the same parentage:

‘And therefore now
Let her, that is the womb and tomb of all,
Great Nature, take, and forcing far apart
Those blind beginnings that have made me man
Dash them anew together at her will
Through all her cycles—into man once more,
Or beast or bird or fish, or opulent flower—
But till this cosmic order everywhere
Shatter’d into one earthquake in one day
Cracks all to pieces,—and that hour perhaps
Is not so far when momentary man
Shall seem no more a something to himself,
But he, his hopes and hates, his homes and fanes,
And even his bones long laid within the grave,
The very sides of the grave itself shall pass,
Vanishing, atom and void, atom and void,
Into the unseen for ever,—till that hour,

My golden work in which I told a truth
 That stays the rolling Ixionian wheel,
 And numbs the Fury's ringlet-snake, and plucks
 The mortal soul from out immortal hell,
 Shall stand: ay, surely: then it fails at last
 And perishes as I must; for O Thou,
 Passionless bride, divine Tranquillity,
 Yearn'd after by the wisest of the wise,
 Who fail to find thee, being as thou art
 Without one pleasure and without one pain,
 Howbeit I know thou surely must be mine
 Or soon or late, yet out of season, thus
 I woo thee roughly, for thou carest not
 How roughly men may woo thee so they win—
 Thus—thus: the soul flies out and dies in the air.'

Throughout the poem are scattered other lines never to be surpassed for roll and majesty; and it is hard to find the poet's strength of hand giving way in the final words:

'With that he drove the knife into his side:
 She heard him raging, heard him fall; ran in,
 Beat breast, tore hair, cried out upon herself
 As having fail'd in duty to him, shriek'd
 That she but meant to win him back, fell on him,
 Clasp'd, kiss'd him, wail'd: he answer'd, "Care not thou!
 What matters? All is over: Fare thee well!"'

This appendix is almost pure prose, and recalls the ruin of the effective termination to *Enoch Arden*.

'So passed the strong heroic soul away.
 And when they buried him, the little port
 Had seldom seen a costlier funeral.'

The advantage of knowing that Enoch's successor to the throne of his wife's affections did not omit to pay due funereal respect to the man whom he had so

horribly wronged is no compensation whatever for the artistic flaw through which the information is conveyed; and if the subject of *Enoch Arden* were not such as to repel the bulk of readers from frequent intercourse with the poem, this flaw would be felt as a burden. It cannot be too deeply regretted that an analogous imperfection should have found its way into a poem so thoroughly great and desirable as *Lucretius*. Having passed from the first 'idyllic' paragraph into the dramatic method, the mere return to narration is surely an anti-climax; and looking at the able maintenance of the dramatic character of *Lucretius* to the moment of the stab, it is lamentable that the monologue was not worked up to a vigorous climax. That the narrative given in pure prose, in the narrator's words, could have been placed by implication in the concluding phrases of the monologue, cannot be doubted by any one who has studied the monologue in its best forms; and that the Laureate, having brought so much dramatic genius to the construction of the work, might readily have culminated his monologue triumphantly, is almost as evident. He *has* very greatly improved the termination in reprinting the poem, not indeed by removing the last paragraph altogether, as we could have wished, but by changing the weak and meagre line,

'What matters? All is over: Fare thee well!'

for the characteristic line,

‘Thy duty? *What is duty?* Fare thee well!’

This change is but small; but it gives to the last paragraph a better standing, by opening up a truly Lucretian issue and restoring the dramatic balance lost in the dry supplemental narrative. The final fall is the one flaw worth naming; and it is to the poet’s eternal credit that he has not only wrenched a meaning of the deepest purity from the legend, but has also, while treating the subject with the unflinching hand of no poetic prude, given us a work as conspicuous for external severity as some of the purest and noblest works of Michel Angelo.

Perhaps the best lyric published by Tennyson since 1855 is *The Higher Pantheism* in the *Holy Grail* book: whatever be the philosophic or theological issues involved in it, it has the true lyric note of the author’s best manner—a flash of the vigour and originality of musical word-work that characterise *Maud* throughout so many of its sections:

‘The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains—
Are not these, O Soul, the Vision of Him who reigns?’

Is not the Vision He? tho’ He be not that which He seems?
Dreams are true while they last, and do we not live in dreams?

Earth, these solid stars, this weight of body and limb,
Are they not sign and symbol of thy division from Him?

Dark is the world to thee: thyself art the reason why;
For is He not all but thou, that hast power to feel “I am I”?

Glory about thee, without thee; and thou fulfillest thy doom,
Making Him broken gleams, and a stifed splendour and gloom.

Speak to Him thou for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet—
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

God is law, say the wise; O Soul, and let us rejoice,
For if He thunder by law the thunder is yet His voice.

Law is God, say some: no God at all, says the fool;
For all we have power to see is a straight staff bent in a pool;

And the ear of man cannot hear, and the eye of man cannot see;
But if we could see and hear, this Vision—were it not He?"

Every now and then in the world's history some variation of the pantheistic doctrine crops up among the multitudinous false ideas to be found at all seasons in the mind of man; and in these later times an ornate but bootless pantheism has taken its rank among the rest of modern mental vagaries. Now and again the writings of Tennyson show a tinge of this same pantheism; but in no poem has he given it so complete and straightforward a treatment as here. All pantheism, even the best worked up to theory-pitch, is but vague and cloud-shrouded stuff; but in no instance is any form of the doctrine thrown into so perfect a poetic shape as in this lovely lyric. The amount of dogma in the poem does not corrode the texture, is in no sense insidious, and will not force its way into the mind for anything other than what it is. In general, these noble couplets appeal through the ear to the sense of enjoyment for beau-

tiful harmonies; and in the one couplet where the devotional sense is awakened, the theist's heart is stirred by a sense of *personal* deity very remote from pantheism in any of its forms:

'Speak to Him thou for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can
meet—

Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.'

These lines are of course accurate enough from the point of view of pantheism—the existence of God as the good element in everything; but as lines which will probably rest more firmly in the mind than any other portion of the poem, they suggest a personal omnipresent God, cognisant of the individual's joys and sorrows, and sympathetically cognisant.

It would be exceedingly difficult to find a happier instance than this poem of the fine effect attainable by the judicious and sparing use of dactylic and anapæstic feet; and, after these feet being used with a delicately-retentive hand almost throughout, such a line as the second of the last couplet but one comes in with masterly effect with alternate anapæsts in its six feet:

'For all | we have power | to see | is a straight | staff bent | in a pool.'

It is indeed a trial to turn from a poem like this, and encounter on the very next page such a piece as the following:

'Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies;—

Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.'

Sans music, sans form, sans grammar, sans everything.

It may be thought ungenerous to notice this 'little sin;' but such sins cannot be unduly reprehended. What so rare a poet as the Laureate once commits to print can never be suppressed, but must remain against him in perpetuity—seeing how every scrap put forth by him is treasured by hundreds, perhaps thousands, against the day of expiration of copyright. What he issues once, posterity *will* have; and therefore should he take good heed to follow the course praised by him in his predecessor and 'utter nothing base.'

The latest serious task he has imposed on the critic is not an agreeable one: it is that of discussing in an adverse sense the claims of the Arthurian collection as a complete work. Assuming the existence of a series of poems wherein certain things are narrated in the form of separate episodes, each complete in itself and none necessary as a condition of the existence of another; assuming such poems to have been always found pleasant reading, in whatever order read, each being worked out and rounded-in in a manner not merely suggestive of, but betraying clearly, an intention to produce a complete and inde-

pendent whole ; assuming thus much, would such a series of poems rise to the dignity of one grand work by the mere discovery that the author intended, or might be assumed to have intended, to fashion forth certain connected moral sentiments or religious doctrines, to be discovered by careful dissection of the characters of the poems and deep consideration of the episodes composing the whole ? I think not. Provided a poet have the keen creative faculty of setting before us living beings, whose lives and thoughts come home to us with the force of experienced realities, whatever purity may be in his soul is sure to pass outward unharmed through the medium of the mingled good and evil of whatever characters he may depict ; and in exercising the holy function of poet force is more likely to be lost than gained through trenching on the noble function of preacher by becoming directly appellant. In drama, monologue, or idyll, the best path to greatness lies in nobility of human conception and grasp and firmness of human delineation ; and the attempt to make human beings the types or masks of dogmas and principles usually results in a greater or less failure. Still, if one were called upon to reconsider, in the light of some newly-discovered subtlety of ulterior intention, a work of such strength in human delineation that its characters had commended themselves as veritable men and women, and taught the

great lessons to be deduced from the lives of all men and women, the ulterior intent *might* lend a new value to the poem. But no clandestine thread should ever create in discerning eyes a unity between poems possessing no unity by virtue of palpable fleshly ties. If a true poet have the gift of large construction added to that of lofty song-craft, he will not need to seek cement in the rich stores of religious thought or codified morality: his religion and his morality will be throughout and under all, not in set symmetrical order, but blended into the lines of his work irregularly, flashing here and there with the fluent flashes of that grander conscientiousness which has become a natural habit of the heart instead of a mechanical function of the mind. The most religious man is not he who can repeat most glibly the dogmas of his faith and quote the greatest amount of sacred tradition, but he who has most faithfully assimilated true principles of religion, and holds them dispersed, half-recognised, unboasted, guiding and tinting his universal life; and thus the greatest inculcation of religion open to art is that accomplished with a fervid intuition of rectitude, the lines and exactnesses whereof are lost in the outlined fulness of a grand human conception. For a poem wherein the intimate tissues are thus qualified by an ante-natal religiousness, wherein the morality is not anatomical but cellular, there will always be (to follow up this analogy

suggested by the high science of life) critical histologists to lay finger on this and that part, and announce to the untechnical the quality and meaning of the tissue; but such quality and meaning would often be knowledge as new to the poet's self as to the uninstructed audience—knowledge indeed as new as the chemistry of honey to the bee, or as the laws of uterine gestation to the fruitful rabbit. Doubtless the poet's mind would grasp and recognise the codification deduced from his work; but he would deny any intention that such codification should ever have been deduced—his proper rôle lying outside and around the considerations set forth by the critic. If this were not the case, and if the poet's retort to the critic were 'Yes, that *was* my intention,' then one would suspect the human depth of the poem, and examine scrupulously its texture to get satisfied as to the order of the men and women delineated, and the intrinsic value of the situations in which they might be placed.

This is something like the attitude into which the critic was forced on the appearance of the new collection of *Idylls*, published last year,—*The Holy Grail*, &c.

There was a note facing the title-page of the volume, directing that the new idylls were to be taken with the old ones and the *Morte d'Arthur*, and read in a prescribed order; in that order they were pub-

lished in the 'pocket-volume edition' of Tennyson's works issued simultaneously with the new book; and in that order they are also published as a separate whole. Nor is this all; for a new position was authoritatively claimed for the two series on grounds of their alleged connexity through ulterior and ordered significance.

The claim was made by the late Dean Alford in the *Contemporary Review* for January 1870, in an article teaching us to regard the whole of the *Idylls*, old and new, as 'a great *connected* poem, dealing with the very highest interests of man.' We are told to look upon the King Arthur of those idylls as figuring forth the 'higher soul of man.' The sense in which that term is used is laid down unmistakably: it means 'the highest part of man—that which leads and commands—that which is alone receptive of kindling from heaven—this it is which the ages educate—this which is susceptible of defeat, corruption, postponement of its high aims and upward progress,—but which, in the long run of the world's complete history, we have faith to believe shall prove to have been well led, through all its compound action and passion, by Him who has the hearts of men in His hand.' This higher soul 'in its purity, in its justice, in its nobleness, in its self-denial,' the Dean alleged Tennyson to figure forth by 'the King.' In the King's coming—in 'his foundation of the

Round Table—his struggles, and disappointments, and departure,’ Dean Alford saw ‘the conflict continually maintained between the spirit and the flesh;’ and in the ‘pragmatical issue’ he recognised the ‘bearing down in history, and in individual man, of pure and lofty Christian purpose by the lusts of the flesh, by the corruptions of superstition, by human passions and selfishness.’ ‘But,’ he continued, ‘in history likewise, and preëminently in the individual human life, though the high soul of man is surrounded and saddened and outwardly defeated by these adverse and impure influences, yet in the end shall it triumph, and pass into glory. This is the theme which we trace through the *Idylls of the King*, and, tracing it, we regard it as simply ridiculous and beside the purpose to speak of the four which were, or the eight which are, as insulated groups or pictures. One noble design rules, and warms, and unites them all.’ Not merely figurative is the expression ‘we trace,’ for in the article in question the next and principal step is to trace through the newly-arranged idylls the workings of that design; and most lovingly is this done—such allegorical significance as may be found in the poems in question being brought forth to the light thoroughly.

We need not follow the late learned divine through the details of his exegesis. It is not altogether because he claimed for the poems in question

—on grounds which are inadmissible—a place which one must dispute, that this exposition is introduced; but because also, in concluding, he stated that such exposition was not ‘a mere invention of his own,’ implying, beyond a doubt, that the poet’s intention was *known* to him to be that expounded: it was on that known intention, and on that alone, that the claim of greatness as a complete whole was based, for Dean Alford said expressly that he believed this ‘general design to constitute the essential unity of the whole collection;’ and, coming from the source whence it did emanate, accompanied by the authorised rearrangement of the old idylls together with the new, the whole exposition and claim must be regarded as a challenge from the poet.

If M. Taine’s theory of a decadence in every artist and school of artists is to be applied in this case, the decadence period of Tennyson must be taken as commencing with the issue of *The Idylls of the King*. They are full of beauties in their own peculiar manner of workmanship; fine ideas abound throughout them; the music of words is heard through their varying pages in many a perfect lyric; and they possess numerous passages which, for weight of thought weightily set forth, have long ago passed into the permanent station of household words. In fine, the stock of the English tongue and the tone of the English mind cannot fail to benefit from them. But

the men and women—do they individually and collectively stand carved in the heart as well as shaped in the mind? Does one feel towards them as towards brothers and sisters, whether in misery or in triumph? To me they have always, on the whole, presented a certain remoteness, totally unconnected with the remoteness of the times: they seem too evidently to be moved by an external hand, holding with a somewhat painful anxiety all their threads, rather than by inner deep-down impulses such as would lead us to lay heart to heart with them and share in the burden of their woe, or joy in the brightness of their joy. It is not that the poems are wanting in pathos, be it remarked; for much that we read in connection with the long-suffering Enid, the love-stricken Elaine, the vanity-befooled Merlin, the conscience-crushed Guinevere, is moving and eloquent, as well as beautiful; but if we analyse carefully the nature of the feeling called up by this motive eloquence, we find it to be rather a sense that such things as the poet tells are possible as occurrences to ourselves, or to those personally dear to us, than a vivid carefulness as to what is happening to the persons concerned in the poetic fiction,—in a word, a *lyric* rather than a *dramatic* pathos. Take the supreme situation of all, the grovelling of the adulterous Guinevere at the feet of her husband—the prostration of convicted corruption before stainless and immovable virtue: one sees the

delicate beauty of the pencilling, hears the large, rolling, fluent majesty of the king's accusation and forgiveness; but Arthur seems to speak less from a form of flesh than from a sun-irradiated cloud, and the dissection of Guinevere's conscience is not carried deep enough to show the human heart of her in its rags and tatters of sin, and also in its glow and warmth of humanness, and thus fill us with a real breathless awe at her situation. She is young, beautiful, sinful, convicted, repentant; but these qualities are thrown together in her rather with the delicate strategy of great mosaic work than with the naïve reality of what Mr. H. A. Page happily terms 'vicarious thinking;' and unless the poet can so far shake off the weight of all *sense* of poetising as to place himself absolutely in the position of each individual treated by him, it is impossible that his characters should attain the needful degree of *insouciance* for convincing reality.

But the more important grounds on which these pieces fall short of ranking as a whole lie in isolation of interest, total unsuitableness of the plan for purposes of large construction, and even what would scarcely be expected—heterogeneity of conception; for after all, whatever may be said about the peerless conception of King Arthur in these poems, the King Arthur of 1842 (the hero, that is to say, of the *Morte d'Arthur*) is not the same embodiment as the King

Arthur of 1859 and later years. The former exceeds the latter in reality and attraction to the intelligent reader of to-day as greatly as the author's marvellous lyrics exceed the maudlin sentimentalities of Tom Moore. The Arthur of later times is made to have too much of the apocryphal, unattainable demigod, and we are apt to leave him with a sigh, as we might leave an exhortation to do things beyond human power; but the other is practical and real, as well as noble and magnificent, and we feel that Arthur is

‘Then most god-like, being most a man.’

The Arthur of that poem is before all things a man of immense personal ascendant, and the traits of humanity so plentifully developed throughout the piece convey a warm sense of fellowship, even though of worshipful fellowship: the quick pant of a strong man dying, and who knows himself dying, rises to our ears distinctly and pathetically; and yet, blended with this, we find an indomitable fortitude and preparation for every emergency, and that splendid command of kingliness shown in the *compulsion* of Bedivere to do what he has hesitated to do for love's or duty's sake. It is probably in that one passage, more than in any other modern passage on Arthur, that sympathy and respect are most forcibly engaged—there that we feel the hero to be at once a man and a king:

'Yet, for a man may fall in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

This electrical threat, embedded as it is between death-throes and followed by immediate performance of the task imposed, is one of the master-touches of a masterly poem—a poem, indeed, so masterly that it is impossible to *feel* its fitness of companionship with the Arthurian *Idylls* wherewith it is now classified. The *Morte d'Arthur* stood alone when it was published, and, as far as one can judge from all subsequent works by the same hand, is destined to stand alone—not, be it understood, from *superiority* to poems in a different manner, but simply by virtue of difference. It is straightforward, direct, muscular in every line; and in general order of narration there is no swerving, no approach to that inversion of points of time which suits the other poems well enough as having no sufficient scope or grandeur of action to magnify, as that does, the direct manner of narration. Inversions of the order of time are among the technical artifices tending to give a variety to the texture of each *Idyll of the King*; and it is just this artificially attained variety which, more perhaps than any other consideration, separates these poems irretrievably, and gives to them, when one attempts to look at them as a whole, a bizarre oscillation most uncomfortable to the artistic sense. No one can

ever truly think that, to obtain this pleasing variety in each piece, the poet, having regard to the project of making the whole a connected work whereon to base his reputation for sustained power, elected to use this form bearing condemnation on its very surface as a form for divisions of one work: for to what does this same cleverly attained variety lead when considered in the long run of the series, and not in the pieces as individuals? What is the consequence, from the merest common-sense point of view, if we take up the old *Idylls* and the new, read them as directed, and try to imagine that what we have before us is one work, and that a great work? 'Inextinguishable laughter!' We get on very well to the end of the first poem, which treats of the advent of the hero; but even then we are rather surprised, considering that we are reading an 'Arthuriad,' to find the formation of the Round Table, the consolidation of the kingdoms under one crown, and the twelve battles with the heathen, disposed of in five lines; and a still ruder surprise is it to find the King married in that idyll, when we know that the history of Lancelot's fetching the bride elect is to be given in a later one. But next comes *Enid*, in the opening of which we are introduced to Geraint as leaving court with his wife, for fear her purity may be tainted by contact with the ill-reputed Queen: then we go back to Geraint's courtship of Enid, their

marriage, &c. (an immense digression), and return to the point of divergence to wind Geraint's and Enid's life up to what one would not suppose an *untimely* end,—the death of Geraint, who

‘ Crown'd

A happy life with a fair death, and fell
Against the heathen of the Northern Sea
In battle, fighting for the blameless King'—

fell, that is to say, in one of the twelve great battles so summarily disposed of in the last book; so that we come round again to the point we left there. The next poem, *Virien*, is not so clear as to point of time, but is more than any disconnected from the rest by manner of treatment, though in it too there is much retrospective discussion of Arthurian characters. Again in *Elaine* we open on a certain situation, are carried back to work up to it again, and afterwards pass on beyond it. Then in *The Holy Grail* we are shown the death-bed of Sir Percivale, who reveals, in dialogue with a monk, his reminiscences of the quest of the ‘holy grail.’ Again in *Pelleas and Ettarre* comes the forward situation, the knighting of Pelleas, and afterwards what led to it. But here, in justice be it noted, there is an attempt at the end to lead up to *Guinevere*, the next piece in the prescribed order; the last line of *Pelleas and Ettarre* is,

‘And Modred thought, “The time is hard at hand.”’

For Modred sees the scandal of the Queen and Lan-

celot to be near breaking into an open shame ; and *Guinevere* opens upon the Queen in hiding at Almesbury. Then, as usual, the poet carries us back with him to learn the particulars of her fleeing thither. Afterwards he gives her interview with the outraged King Arthur, dismisses the King to fight his final battle, and leaves him 'moving ghost-like to his doom,' to return and show us the concluding years of *Guinevere's* life. This must have been a considerable number of years ; but we are called upon to annul the interval in our minds, take up again the story of Arthur, and follow him to his death (or rather his 'doom,' for he does not die at all), although his passing is really far earlier than *Guinevere's*.

A more lamentable state of things than this it is hard to imagine as the sober and well-considered plan of a great poet ; and it is hard to conceive how the Laureate can have persuaded himself or been persuaded to run the risk of challenging public opinion by putting the poems forward in the character of a whole ; for one *must* regard the scheme as a hasty and ill-considered one, not as the mature execution of an old and cherished design. To think otherwise would be to undervalue those technical abilities for which the Laureate has held for so many years, and worthily held, an undisputed reputation among the best modern poets. We are of course

bound to accept the positive statement that these poems are now connected 'in accordance with an early project of the author's;' but it may be accepted *cum grano salis*. It is not at all unlikely that the poet who wrote the *Morte d'Arthur* (prefixing to it a scene of college friends talking over the epic whereof one of them, the author, had burnt all but one book) had even then conceived the notion of writing a great deal more poetry of the same kind to lead up to the grand termination already executed; but in justice to the poet's sense of artistic propriety in 1842, it must be assumed that whatever 'project' then existed had reference to poetry of strictly the same class—not to little pieces of cramped scope and other workmanship which might be issued separately without its ever being suspected that they were meant to be made into a book including their great predecessor; and perhaps we are farther justified, or indeed doing the greatest justice to the author, in assuming that this project had been long abandoned when *Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere* were taken severally in hand. Granting this, and knowing how weak the flesh is to sustain even the shadow of a relaxation of once-accorded worship, how unwilling to submit to any division of kingship, we can well understand how the issue and approval of several recent works, on a large scale, by other poets, should revive in the Laureate's mind that 'early project.' If this be so, it was per-

haps a pardonable weakness in a man whose judgment is so endangered by adulation to turn to the popular *Idylls of the King*, patch them together with a few new ones, crown them with the vigorous, youthful *Morte d'Arthur*, and present them as his *magnum opus*.

So far as regards the great aim claimed for these pieces as an entire work, I must in honesty aver that I fail to see that aim underlying the whole. The idea of man's higher soul striving, through all obstacles, to attain to a great altitude of holiness and purity is magnificent; but, while possessing much virtue for the inspiration of a noble didactic poetry, it is not quite calculated to form the basework of a noble epic or dramatic structure. In many parts of the *new idylls* of the Laureate, this idea is plain enough; but its 'ruling and warming and uniting the whole' seems to me the fiction of a kindly mind. For, firstly, they are often cold; secondly, they are not united; and thirdly, such poems as *Vivien* and the *Morte d'Arthur* stand too rigidly apart for any critic to maintain successfully that they are in any sense subject to this general regulation. The Dean's criticism was able and acute: it pierced to the end of the question, and showed up thoughts correlative to the acts expressed in these poems; but as regards the establishment of those thoughts in the position of an underlying and permeating influence, I feel no

conviction, and must always regard the grand thought of the struggling soul of man and its weary noble wars with 'the world, the flesh, and the devil,' as an after-thought, supervening in all probability at that point in the construction of these poems when Tennyson took in mind the subject of the holy grail. The fact that all the poems may be wrested to an allegorical sense carries nothing with it, and can never drive acute men from the position that the idea on which so much is claimed is more properly a coping-structure than a basework.

An 'Arthuriad,' to be anything at all in our literature, must at least possess unimpeachable greatness of form and indubitable flesh and blood; and any 'Arthuriad' impoverished of these things must step more or less within reach of the pungent sarcasm of her who, discerning 'character and glory' in her own times, wrote—

'I do distrust the poet who discerns
No character or glory in his times,
And trundles back his soul five hundred years,
Past moat and drawbridge, into a castle court,
To sing—O, not of lizard or of toad
Alive i' the ditch there,—'twere excusable,
But of some black chief, half knight, half sheep-lifter,
Some beauteous dame, half chattel and half queen,
As dead as must be, for the greater part,
The poems made on their chivalric bones.'

An antiquarian theme may seize on a poet with a conviction so unrelenting as to carry with it every modern requirement in conception and craftsman-

ship; but it is superfluous to say that poetic preparations carefully—almost painfully—elaborated piece by piece, and held half-crazily together by some abstruse significance glimmering dimly in the background, remain outside the order of these old themes galvanised into new life—revive no waning reputations—are no capital boon to the reading world—and bring no profit to the poet beyond what may be roundly and grossly told in terms of pounds, shillings, and pence.

We may respect the oneness of sentiment shown by those who accept the collection in the light of a *magnum opus*—respect the sturdy determination to support the popular idol in every position. Tennyson never has been reputed a poet of large constructiveness; and we cannot expect those who, ignoring *Maud*, have yet supported his reputation as a growing one through the issue of the old *Idylls*, *Enoch Arden*, and the new *Idylls*, to trouble themselves much about the question of construction and conception. But to those who held by *Maud*, when that beautiful work came out in its originality and excellence of form, in its truth of humanness, and in its large and subtle dramatic unity—came out too decked in a new guise of that old lyric loveliness always the salient characteristic of the Laureate's books—came out and was received with general coldness and occasional contempt—to those who built on *Maud* large

hopes of an ever-increasing greatness in Tennyson's poetry, had those hopes undermined by *The Idylls of the King* and toppled over by *Enoch Arden*, it comes home as a bitter jest to be asked to take the collected *Idylls* as what they now aspire to be thought.

Having got from the Laureate three relays of overgrown idylls, we cannot but long—not for another *Maud*: that were too covetous—but, say, for an extension of that perfect marvel of harmonious work and conception printed in modest little type at the end of *Enoch Arden*, &c., and called *Boadicæa*, and 'an experiment.' Experiment or not, *Boadicæa*, even as she figures in this short fragment, outweighs in human truth and artistic value whole hosts of Enochs and Arthurs; and her terrible ferocity in revolt against a hideous ill is of greater price than twenty quests after the shadowy phantom of a sacramental cup. Another 'experiment' in the same volume excites a great thirst for more of the same quality and style—the Catullian hendecasyllabics, addressed to an imaginary chorus of indolent reviewers,

'Irresponsible, indolent reviewers.'

Most reviewers were in effect too indolent to appraise fairly this delicious little gem, or to point out where it failed or fell short of its own ideal. The metre in which it is written is one of the most difficult for English hands. Some writers who have written small

poems or fragments in it—and I recall no instance of a considerable English poem in it—some writers are contented to regard it as a quantitative metre alone, thus doing a certain violence to our tongue, and consequently to ordinary English ears: others regard accent alone, and disregard quantity; but the Laureate's specimen combines in a great degree both elements, and naturalises the metre thoroughly while keeping its classic ideal almost unfringed. Mr. Swinburne's poem in this metre is one of the best from a technical point of view. It begins—

'In thē | mōnth of thē | lōng dē|cline of | rōsēs,'

and should, of course, be scanned throughout as above shown; but it makes a hazardous start, from the fact that almost any unclassical eye will read this line as consisting of two anapæsts, an iambus, and an amphibrach, thus—

'In thē mōnth | of thē lōng | dēcline | of rōsēs,'

ignoring the quantity given to the i of 'in' by the position of that word before 'the.' No such line can be found in the Laureate's sample: most of the lines are quite perfect. Perhaps the best line in the language as a specimen of the metre is—

'Since I blush to belaud myself a moment;'

and none in the poem fall gravely away from this pattern, except one: the one referred to is not

'Hard, hard, hard is it only not to tumble,'

because there the initial spondee takes the place of a trochee with the evident purpose of creating an artistic hesitancy. But the line

‘O blātānt māg|āzīnes | rēgārd | mē rāthēr,’

is not a Catullian hendecasyllable at all, but the ordinary Italian hendecasyllable that cuts up the severity of so much of our great blank verse. The line would come right by a simple change—

‘Blātānt | *dūll māgā|āzīnes rē|gārd mē | rāthēr,’

and it is surprising that the fault and its remedy have never occurred to the Laureate.

It is necessary to record that an element has appeared in Tennyson’s blank verse, not in it of old, and scarcely to be regarded either as accidental or as beneficial—namely the introduction, here and there, of absolutely formless lines into an otherwise finely-woven fabric—such lines, for instance, as

‘Tower after tower, spire beyond spire’ (*Holy Grail*, p. 47),

which can only be painfully scanned by making ‘tower’ first a monosyllable and then a dissyllable, and subjecting ‘spire’ to the inverse process. Almost the same sort of formlessness is in the line—

‘Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere’ (*Ibid.* p. 9),

almost the same, because the line is to be iambified

* Any monosyllable of the same quantity will do as well.

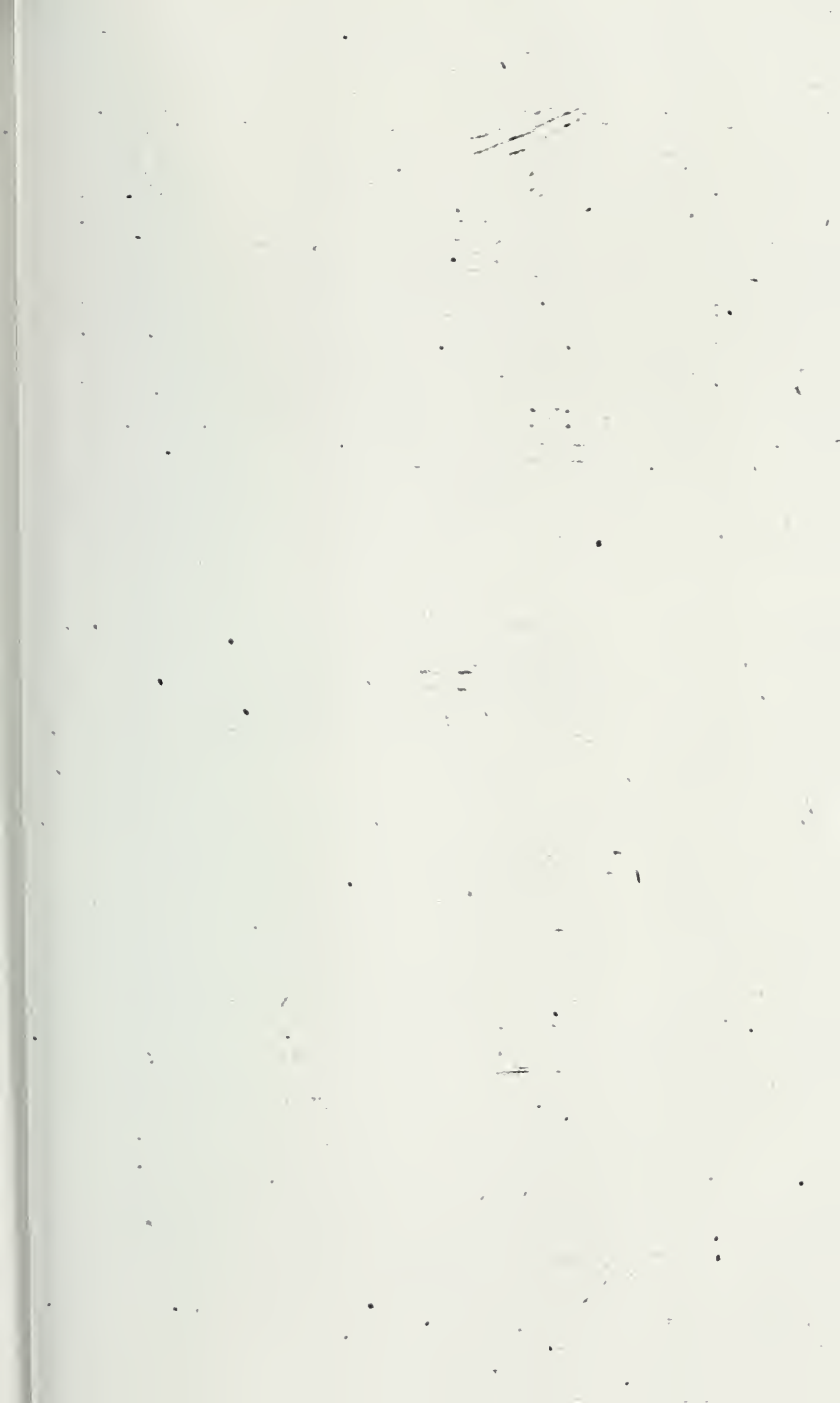
by an analogous inconsistency as regards the two letters 'i' in 'Ulfius' and 'Brastias.' Perhaps the most disagreeable and impracticable instance is the line—

'And the sword of the tourney across her throat' (*Ibid.* p. 118),

which can be read as a fine line by recklessly bestowing on the words 'the' and 'of' a weight which they could only carry ridiculously. These things are noted because the Laureate's ideal of poetry includes immense perfection in the details, and because these flaws have been evidently made intentionally to give variety, which variety is merely disfiguring.

Whatever be the nature of the Laureate's poems from time to time issued, there is one thing which we seem, so far, to be always, with trifling exceptions, safe in expecting—namely samples of the English tongue which, regarded merely as terse, brilliant, crisp, and absolutely compact specimens of expression, almost no one can rival. Tennyson has reduced the combined clarity, brevity, and pithiness of our language to the lowest term yet attained; and probably there is hardly a keenly-observant writer of the day, whether he write in prose or in verse, but has largely benefited by the simple linguistic refinements of the Laureate. With him the language has become so highly tempered, and at the same time so malleable, that no condensation of much matter into

a small space, no weaving of words into metres and rhythms supposed impracticable, seems to be beyond the reach of his cunning hand. The splendid results now and again attained, in exercising this power in fresh directions, render more poignant than it would otherwise be our chagrin at the Laureate's persistence in devoting his noble powers to work less than noble.



II.

MENELLA BUTE SMEDLEY.

' A sharp keen sight to track the spire
Of delicate motive, in the ways
Of Love ;—a mellow voice to raise
With skilful smiting of the lyre.'

MENELLA BUTE SMEDLEY.

THE question why the stage-drama should be as degraded as it now is in this country is one rather of minute ethics than of esthetics—the answer resting not in the incapacity of authors, but in the degenerate tastes of audiences. The same prevailing state of mind which has supported a vast deal of literature to be classed as low, rather than as light, has called for a low-pitched sensationalism combined with a puerile realism in stage representations; and the class of people who form the bulk of contemporary theatre-audiences are not such as care to have their minds lifted out of the restless stupor they get by soaking in what is uniformly base from an esthetic point of view.

Consequently, new legitimate plays have not of late years been attempted for the British stage—or, if they have, they have failed; and dramatic talent has been turned rather towards subjects quite unfit to offer to a British audience nowadays, these subjects being treated in a way which would ensure the contempt of such audience.

The question whether a higher tone of drama

than we now witness might not be introduced with permanent advantage—whether the taste might not be led a step or two by an infusion of soundness in a light fabric—is grave and hard to answer.

In Miss Smedley's well-known volume of poems the chief piece is a play—*Lady Grace*; and if such a result as that referred to were to be attained, it is perhaps in such plays as *Lady Grace* that we might seek a model; though, to speak truth, it may be feared that the tone of this work is far too pure, the dashes of poetic thought and comeliness of diction far too frequent and refined, to leave much hope of such a result from placing that play, or other such plays, on the stage.

Yet here are excellent adaptabilities for stage-work of today. The subject is one of modern 'high life,' the scenes of a rapid enough variety, the interest thoroughly sustained throughout, and the lighter dialogue brilliant and often amusing. Certainly we cannot taunt Miss Smedley with having woven into the web of her work any sufficiency of sensationalism and vulgar realism to meet the grim demand for false emotion and real 'properties;' for indeed here her play would utterly fail: yet she has bestowed considerable care on the rendering of everything perfectly perspicuous, so that the bent of the action would need no elucidative comment or pause of reflection. The speeches and dialogues, taken in

detail, are as free from involution as the larger outlines; and yet the speech is never vapid or trivial, any more than the set of the main current is ever faltering or obscure.

From a literary point of view the author is no more to be passed by with the daily crowd of poetasters and playwrights than from a histrionic point of view. The materials of the drama *Lady Grace* are equally well selected in whichever light we regard them. Lady Grace Aumerle, a rich young widow, whose husband has had rather her reverence than the full current of the love of a rich nature, finds herself surrounded by suitors, none of whom she affects, and in sore want of some object to spend her love upon: she makes overtures to an orphan nephew and niece to become her adopted children, and then tries to win from them a frankness of affection which has been put beyond their power to yield by small corruptions of the world in which they have grown to young man and approximate young woman. Down the footway of failure after failure to make these young people love her and trust her with openness, the lady glides step by step to a state of mind bordering on despair of finding a noble use for her life; and when at last she gets her niece out of a foolish scrape at the expense of her own good name, she is on the point of joining a 'sisterhood of mercy.' But in the mean time a real affection has been grow-

ing in her heart towards a young lawyer, Cranston, entrusted with her affairs, and who has loved her years before her marriage, though she does not recognise in the lawyer a boy with whom, under a different name, she played as a girl. Cranston hesitates to woo the Lady Grace, not on the mean ground that she is above him in rank, but because he has in his possession a sealed codicil to her husband's will, under which it is willed that, if she marry again, the half of her fortune should go to her niece and nephew, the other half being settled, not on her, but on her second husband; and also that no communication to this effect be made to the lady unless she be married again—a delicate and almost insurmountable obstacle to an offer of marriage from a man of noble character such as Cranston is painted. In her desperation she holds friendly counsel with this Cranston; and the position in which he is thus placed is sustained by him with an ability and self-control productive of some fine passages of speech. In discussing her disappointment with her young relatives he trenches with great *finesse* on the subject next his heart. 'A crown is in your reach,' he says; and again,

'Your life lies out before you like a field
Wherein you have but paced a little way;
What matter if you stumpled? Stand upright,
Pass by the grave where you have wept enough,
Pass it, and leave your tender thoughts upon it,

Your faithful memories, your gracious flowers;
But not your hopes, but not your living self!
Go on to better joys.'

And when the lady doubts the possibility of following such happy counsel, he urges her to seek a haven in love, to elect a companion from among the men around her:

'Choose nobly—choose at once!
Your equal, lest men scorn you in your choice;
Your master, lest you scorn yourself in him;
Your slave—but that is sure. And, having chosen
Make love the centre of your days, and leave
All else upon the verge.'

So successfully does he veil his heart's meaning in the phrases thus beautifully turned by the poet, that the lady feels herself shamed by his apparent coldness; and, failing his love, she would have taken his advice as far as possible by marrying one of her suitors, Lord Lynton, but for her niece's fortunate scrape, which, in robbing her of her good name, withdraws Lord Lynton from the competition, and leaves the field again open for Cranston.

When the lady, unwitting of her husband's tender care for her future, decides to quit society on finding her good fame clouded and her efforts to gain her niece and nephew frustrated, she instructs Cranston to prepare a deed making over her fortune to the young people, with the exception of a small annuity for her own use; and then it is that Cranston dares to speak, and Lady Grace to own the strange attrac-

tion she has felt for him, and indeed to accept him. On learning that Cranston is her old playmate, she exclaims,

‘ You give me back
Some of the secret honour that I lost
When my heart sprang to meet you’—

a touch in which we discern a hand well schooled to leave no trait of the lady’s delicacy of sentiment undeveloped.

There is no need to dwell upon the points of beauty, or of pith and epigrammatic force plentiful enough in this play, or upon the successful sketchiness of the minor characters. Without disparagement to the rest of the volume, it may be frankly said that this piece is far stronger than the general run of its companion pieces, and that the dramatic method would therefore seem to be that in which Miss Smedley excels. This opinion is certainly strengthened by a consultation of *Good Words* for June 1869, wherein appeared ‘a dramatic sketch’ by Miss Smedley, entitled *Choice*—a piece which has attracted but little attention considering its merits. The *choice* which gives the piece its title is that of a young man at Cambridge, who carries all before him up to the point of becoming senior wrangler, and whose friends are bent on a lustrous political career for him—a career for which his genius is eminently fitted, by universal consent. He meanwhile, with

one of those hearts so rarely met, imbued with a sincere religious fire, conceives that he is called by God to help to alleviate the miseries of the world by action in a pastoral course. Under a heavy hand this subject must have resulted in a very unpleasing 'sketch;' but under the delicate touch of the artist who could produce *Lady Grace*, we should expect, and we certainly get, something at once refined and touching. The *choice* is excessively well given in two scenes—the first between the senior wrangler and a crowd of congratulating friends at Cambridge, and the second between the young man and his mother, who has just parted from friends pledged to put her son in the way of making his political fortune, and who is full of ambitious thoughts, dashed to the ground by the revelation of his choice in life. The sequel to this sketch, *Work*, published in the same magazine in January 1870, is scarcely as well handled, though it too has considerable dramatic power. The subject is still more difficult to treat well, and the result proportionately less pleasing.

There is one poem in the volume with *Lady Grace* which shows, in a different form, much the same calibre of dramatic capacity as is to be seen in these strictly dramatic pieces. It is a monologue entitled *A Letter*, wherein a girl pines aloud for her absent lover, and suddenly brightens on opening a letter to say he is coming back from abroad. It is

exceedingly well done, and full of life and blood. It might well be wished that the book contained more poems of this sort, although the lyrical pieces which make up the bulk of the remainder are not to be classed with everyday verse. In some of a more imaginative class a very delicate fancy is apparent, and notably in two or three designated 'parables;' one of these, *Eremos and Eudæmon*, combines a refined intellectuality with a moving pathos, and is charmingly finished. Another parable, *The little fair Soul*, addresses a narrower circle: the reader may sympathise or not with the situation—a 'little fair soul' in 'Paradise' welcoming a brother soul outside, and pleading for him; but there can scarcely be two opinions about the power of pathos and niceness of expression in these three concluding verses, for example:

‘Up all the shining heights he prayed
For that poor Shadow in the cold;
Still came the word, “Not ours to aid;
We cannot make the doors unfold.”

But that poor Shadow, still outside,
Wrung all the sacred air with pain,
And all the souls went up and cried
Where never cry was heard in vain.

No eye beheld the pitying Face,
The answer none might understand,
But dimly through the silent space
Was seen the stretching of a Hand.’

Two poems at the opening of the volume are notably acute in their analysis—the first of ‘a Cha-

racter,' the second of 'a Contrast' of characters; and these two poems as much as any justify the position here assigned to the author. When we read in *A Character* of a 'leader'

'Not vaunting any daily death,
Because he scorns the thing that dies,
And not in love with any breath
That might proclaim him grand or wise,'

is not an echo stirred in the memory?—a faint echo, but still an echo? And when we are told that

'Such a leader lifts his times
Out of the limits of the night,
And, falling grandly, while he climbs,
Falls with his face toward the height,'

does not the echo take on a greater distinctness? If not, try *A Contrast*, which is a better poem than *A Character*, being more extended in subject, and more valuable for the touches of human nature in it:

'Sometimes a little evil voice
Speaks, and is silenced by a prayer;
Sometimes she sees the face of care,
That having wept, she may rejoice.

She touches sorrow with her hand,
Taught softly not to shrink nor frown,
But bring her pity bravely down
To depths she cannot understand.'

The echo becomes palpable! These verses are all sufficiently like Tennyson, and yet sufficiently unlike—like enough for us to know the method studied by a very able poet, and unlike enough to leave no doubt

as to the ability of such poet; unlike enough to stand alone on their own merits, and yet like enough for purposes of classification. It is only in poets of the very highest order that we find a special manner of execution at once thoroughly beautiful and quite original; and Tennyson has worked out such a manner to a high pitch of perfection. Unless a life be devoted to poetry, it is impossible that this can be done; still there are many writers who have a great deal of good thought and sentiment fitter to be given out in verse than in prose, and who have yet not the muscular individuality, or perhaps the time, to work out a method. To such, a model for style or manner is indispensable; and the Laureate need hardly grudge us any amount of sterling poetry put into a pleasing form by the aid of his technical procedures. Miss Smedley in her lyrical pieces is about the best of his disciples; and her poetic thought is as individual and original as her lyric versification at its best is Tennysonian. We do not look for anything higher than this except in the few chief poets of the day; and to say that, besides an excellent drama, Miss Smedley has given us several very sweet poems of Tennysonian character in execution, is no small praise. In one of these pieces, *When the News about the 'Trent' came*, there is some of the most perfect finish attainable. The patriotism is full without being blatant, and the feeling delicate without being

weak or puny. The luscious twilight of the opening verses is an exquisite sample of the translation of a real scene to words; but more exquisite is the nicety with which the patriotic feelings aroused amid such a scene by the news brought to our shores (news of the seizure of Mason and Slidell, the Southern commissioners bound for England on board the 'Trent') is pinned to each detail of that land which the night is gradually absorbing from the poet's sight—as if the writer's heart were clutching at each point in the landscape, to pluck it back from the night, as a patriotic heart would yearn to pluck back the country from the threatened night of disgrace by foreign insult tamely borne:

‘And all our land was thinking war;
I, too, with powerless hopes and hands,
Watched while each pale deliberate star
Struck this wet purple in the sands;

And felt, for each red boss of rock,
Now blackening as the night-time grows;
Each curve of these cliff-walls that lock
Our precious freedom from our foes;

For each small circuit traced by foam,
And marking England to my sight,
Each fringe and fragment of my home,
I could have wished to die to-night.’

The volume containing *Lady Grace* and the several lyrics mentioned above (with a good deal beside) certainly attracted a fair share of notice; but it is remarkable that the educated heart and firm hand

shown here by the author should not have sooner taken a hold on the public mind. Miss Smedley has been putting forth volumes of tales for the last fifteen years; and, partly from an utter scorn of anything approaching sensationalism, partly from the want of that sweep and freedom shown in *Lady Grace*, these tales have not gained a very wide audience, though the delicate truth and honesty of many of them entitle them to one. Even a volume of poetry printed in 1863 has had no fair guerdon of notice, though its excellence is unquestionable. This volume bears the modest title, *The Story of Queen Isabel, and other Verses*, by M. S., and it is acknowledged by Miss Smedley in the title-page of her principal volume. *The Story of Queen Isabel* is a poem of the idyllic order of work, and is not so overgrown or so full of beauties as the *Idylls of the King*. The heroine is of course Isabella of Angoulême, the second wife of King John; and her story is set before us with a delicacy of thought and tenderness of touch rarely to be met with. According to Hume, King John persuaded the Count of Angoulême to steal his daughter away from the Count de la Marche, to whom she was already married; but Miss Smedley has adopted a version according to which Prince John persuades Isabella herself to fly with him, while she is betrothed to the Count, and living under his roof according to old custom. The poem gives an admirable

portrait of that despicable person King John, and a fine sketch of the death of Richard I.; nor is there any one poem in the book which the author need be ashamed to acknowledge.



III.

JEAN INGELow.

' A little way, a very little way,
 they dig into the rind;
And they are very sorry, so they say,
 Sorry for what they find.'

JEAN INGELow.

JEAN INGELow.

I AM not aware that any enterprising author has ever undertaken the compilation of a biographical history of literary popularity as gauged by mercantile success; but, were such a work in existence, the phalanxed follies exhibited in its pages would be something to make the blood run cold, and turn sour that particular little measure of the milk of human kindness which takes, in the critical bosom, the ambiguous form of silent leniency.

It is quite certain that no amount of biographical matter of this description which might be brought together would ever afford material for a satisfactory theory of popularity—or rather marketableness—in literature; but one good result might arise from such a compilation—no one would certainly ever be surprised at the sale of any book of verses, however large the sale, or however monstrous the folly of the book; and as even *agreeable* surprises have their leaven of disagreeableness, this state of things would on the whole be desirable.

To any one who witnessed the success of Robert Montgomery, there can be no ground for surprise in

some contemporary successes which, if unprecedented, would seem next to miraculous; but this exclusion of surprise has no accompaniment of explanation, any more than can be found for a multitude of material facts that are found to recur regularly, 'how or why we don't understand.'

We do not know—we have not the slightest idea—why matters of commerce and finance in the City are shuffled by a panic every ten years; but we observe that it is so. And similarly we do not at all fathom the mystery of the public bestowing periodical worship on some of the rushlights of literature mistaken for stars. Curiously enough too, equally-worthless productions of this class frequently meet with strikingly-unequal treatment;—a fact which seems to support some vague and unpromulgated theory of periodicity in the misdirection of public favour. It is a fact worthy of observation, that the 'poems' of Lord Houghton, for instance, are scarcely mentioned at present—never were very much; while those of Miss Ingelow, which are certainly not many shades better, went through fourteen editions in five years. If the lady's poetry is a shade or two better than the lord's, it is not because there is more originality in it, or more individual merit. Whatever superiority of quality there may seem to be is due simply to the more successful assimilation of some of the fine elements of other greater poetry. In Tennyson's

Enoch Arden volume, it will be remembered, was a little poem headed *The Flower*, aimed at the Laureate's numerous imitators and their patrons. The great master is never less great than when he attempts this sort of thing, as witness the lines *On a spiteful Letter*. However, the fable of *The Flower* is considerably better than those lines: it has meaning; and, such as it is, the meaning is true, though rather small and personal for the utterance of a great man. We all know how he tells us of his flower, once called a weed, but afterwards crowned as a true flower; how thieves stole the seed, and 'sowed it far and wide;' and how

'Most can raise the flowers now,
For all have got the seed.

And some are pretty enough,
And some are poor indeed;
And now again the people
Call it but a weed.'

Whether he would pronounce Miss Ingelow's flowers 'pretty enough' or 'poor indeed,' one cannot guess; but some of them certainly do seem pretty enough, though at the same time poor indeed because of their unoriginality; and hence it seems a little unjust on the part of Fate that, while writers of equal merit or demerit fail to attract much attention, this writer should be receiving a good deal of that very substantial attention paid in purchasing one's books.

Miss Ingelow is one of those numerous writers who, not having as a rule anything really worth saying, somehow manage to make up parcels of vacuity with enough of external mistiness to lead superficial readers to the supposition that there is something very *recherché* in the way of a kernel to this shell of expression. To such superficial readers the idea that a rich thought, easily appreciated by acute minds, lies within an impenetrable garment of rhymes, acts as a stimulant to praise. Many a silly person, who has not the slightest idea of the meaning of anything but the most superficial trash, will, for the sake of appearing wise, praise any misty nonsense in the way of 'poetry;' and thus it is, probably, that among a certain class (and that a good large class) an idea has been circulated that Miss Ingelow is a poetess of exceptional thoughtfulness. In truth she frequently takes up some image or set of images, and works through such a maze of variations that it is not quite easy to follow her; and, while this method of procedure induces many to 'give it up,' owning inwardly their own stupidity, but outwardly descanting on the deep thought of the poetess,—while the enigma remains insoluble to some, other some solve it, and find the answer to be not worth the search.

We all know the story of the emperor's new clothes, told by that wonderful Dane, Hans Christian

Andersen—how certain impostors sent the emperor out naked, under the assurance that they had provided him with the most exquisite garments, which however could not be seen by any man who was either a fool or unfit for his office. Of course the emperor could not admit either proposition in regard to his own august majesty, so forth he went. Of course no one of the spectators could admit himself a fool or unfit for the position he held in life; so every one joined in the chorus of ‘O, how magnificent are the emperor’s new clothes!’ till at last an innocent child, with that peculiarly awkward unguardedness which childhood still exhibits at times, ‘let loose his opinion’ that the emperor was devoid of raiment; and at last this fact became universally recognised. So we trust may the imagined depth of Miss Ingelow’s significances be eventually recognised by every one as fictitious, when some unsophisticated voice shall have sufficiently spoiled of its terrors the idea of confessing that one sees nothing in the verses in which one’s neighbours profess to see stupendous merit and next-to-unfathomable depth.

But the poetess does not always put on these misty coverings to her verses. Very often they are sent forth as ‘utterly naked and bare’ as rhymes can possibly be, without an attempt at anything beyond mere prose presentation of bald shallow matter. Take, for instance, the dialogue passages of which

Supper at the Mill is mainly composed. Here is the opening :

'Mother. Well, Frances.

Frances.

Well, good mother, how are you?

M. I'm hearty, lass, but warm; the weather's warm:
I think 'tis mostly warm on market days.

I met with George behind the mill: said he,

"Mother, go in and rest awhile."

F.

Aye, do,

And stay to supper; put your basket down.

M. Why, now, it is not heavy?

F.

Willie, man,

Get up and kiss your Granny. Heavy, no!

Some call good churning luck; but, luck or skill,

Your butter mostly comes as firm and sweet

As if 'twas Christmas. So you sold it all?"

And so on.

Nothing could well be much more unlike poetry than this. In some other pieces of this sort there is the same attempted imitation of the most simple style adopted by the Laureate in his idyllic pieces; but as for the freshness, the vigour, the gem-like clearness of cut which we get in Tennyson at his utmost simplicity, what shadow of them is there here?

Miss Ingelow has written some pieces which would have enraptured Wordsworth in his vulgarest mood—when, that is to say, he had descended to the deepest depths of that bathos he so often stooped to, notwithstanding the soaring flights for which he was adequately winged. In *Scholar and Carpenter*, a good deal of which is mere imitation of Tennyson,

we find this verse, of which Wordsworth might have been proud had it occurred to him in some unhappy moment :

“For here,” said he, “are bread and beer,
And meat enough to make good cheer;
Sir, eat with me, and have no fear,
For none upon my work depend,
Saving this child; and I may say
That I am rich, for every day
I put by somewhat; therefore stay,
And to such eating condescend.”

For such a solemn piece of commonplace as this it is not easy to find a fitting *pendant* beyond the lowly circuit of Wordsworth's lowest art, of which he was, alas, too fond.

But Miss Ingelow is not entirely dependent on Wordsworth for her successes in bathos. On the contrary, some of her greatest achievements in that line are peculiarly her own in a certain sense. In *Honours* we get passages such as we should vainly look for elsewhere. *Honours* is a poem in which the ‘little differences’ between science and revelation are brought in for trial and discussion. Science, as might be expected, is pooh-poohed as an upstart, and bantered in slightly inelegant terms, such as these three verses :

‘Then all goes wrong : the old foundations rock;
One scorns at him of old who gazed unshod;
One striking with a pickaxe thinks the shock
Shall move the seat of God.

A little way, a very little way
 (Life is so short), they dig into the rind,
 And they are very sorry, so they say,—
 Sorry for what they find.

But truth is sacred—aye, and must be told:
 There is a story long beloved of man;
 We must forego it, for it will not hold—
 Nature had no such plan.'

Science can of course well afford to treat such writing as a joke, and would not fall out with Miss Ingelow if she pleases to amuse herself by writing verses on a subject concerning which she seems to have heard a piece of one side of the discussion; but would it be too hard to suggest that it might have been safer to defer the treatment of a polemical subject till she had thoroughly mastered the grammar of her language? The two lines,

'Is there, O is there aught that *such* as Thou
 Would'st take from *such* as I?'

afford a sample of false concord, which the merest friendliness would not hesitate to point out. It is moreover just possible that some representative of what Miss Ingelow grandiloquently sneers at as 'the baby science, born but yesterday,' might find a flaw in facts as here stated. Who ever heard of geologists or other men of science displaying the miserable spirit implied in the words,

'They are very sorry, so they say,—
 Sorry for what they find?'

On the contrary, men of science are usually very

glad of whatever new truth they find. Science has no object so much in view as the ascertainment of the truth, be it what it may; and, far from indulging in such hysterical stuff as Miss Ingelow credits her with, rejoices more over one false opinion exploded than over ninety-and-nine just opinions that need no explosion. Science too could teach Miss Ingelow a little of that reverence which is so largely deficient in such writing as the verses last quoted and these following :

‘The garden, O the garden, must it go,
Source of our hope and our most dear regret?
The ancient story, must it no more show
How man may win it yet?

And all upon the Titan child's decree,
The baby science, born but yesterday,
That in its rash unlearnèd infancy
With shells and stones at play,

And delving in the outworks of this world,
And little crevices that it could reach,
Discovered certain bones laid up, and furled
Under an ancient beach,

And other waifs that lay to its young mind
Some fathoms lower than they ought to lie . . .’

The large features of Science would never condescend to a wrinkle of disturbance at this kind of intrusion: it is only the critical outsider who must claim from those who hold ‘strictly orthodox’ opinions the same reverential indulgence for honest labourers who unearth unpalatable truths, as Science herself, through her highest exponents, shows to the opinions

and creeds of men, not only when they are doubtful, but when they are known to be false. Such reverence we find thoroughly developed in every great poetic mind; and this is peculiarly the case in Tennyson, who frequently introduces scientific ideas with rectitude of thought, as well as grandeur and delicacy of expression; but to such of his partial imitators as have, like Miss Ingelow, failed to qualify themselves by deep thought, as he has evidently done, Science is a mere bugbear. Such writers would do well to leave subjects of this sort altogether untouched; for to the weak and flabby order of mind fear of contamination must always render the book of science a 'sealed book.'

Miss Ingelow's partisans doubtless flatter themselves and her that she has 'dropped down heavily' on geology in this poem of *Honours*; but it only requires a very limited amount of acuteness to detect the dropping as of the baked-apple order, followed only by pulpy collapse; and they and she might find an instructive lesson on the treatment of scientific themes by unscientific poets in Miss Smedley's beautiful *Plea for Beauty*.

The same irreverence which we have just mentioned as exhibited towards the scientific spirit of the age undergoes a very different manifestation in Miss Ingelow's most pretentious production, *A Story of Doom*, in which the simple old record of the preach-

ing of Noah before the Deluge is made the foundation of a terribly tedious romance, in nine books of the driest blank-verse that it ever entered into the heart of man (or woman either) to conceive. There is no reason at all why subjects coeval with this should not be treated in modern verse; and Mrs. Browning has shown us, in her *Drama of Exile*, how much true magnificence of poetry may be introduced into such a subject. Some of the speeches of Adam and Satan in the *Drama of Exile* may stand beside Milton without fear; for though they do not quite rival the state of Milton as regards the technical quality of the blank-verse, they often surpass him in fire and fury of thought, and in true humanity of feeling; and the Eve of the drama is perhaps a more exquisite creation than the Eve of the epic. But there is a huge gulf between Mrs. Browning and Miss Ingelow: where the one lays on touches of exquisite colour, and revivifies the fading tones of an antique subject, the other paints but to smutch, and resuscitates but to exhibit an ugly monstrosity instead of a grand vital frame. Conceive the wife of Noah, when informed by her lord of the probability of a seafaring life, answering thus:

‘Sir, I am much afraid: I would not hear
Of riding on the waters!’

Note too the lack of artistic propriety in painting Methuselah as a peevish old man vowing implacable

enmity to his God on account of the loss of certain talking and blaspheming Saurians which he was used to yoke to a car when he drove in state, and which God commissioned his angels to pound the heads of with stones! Conceive farther the hopeless state of imagination which would depict Noah and his wife as holding a discussion on the rectitude of a prevalent practice of obtaining a race of pigmies by selective breeding! Such a discussion we get among the grotesque improprieties apparently meant as decorations to the *Story of Doom*; and the practice is deprecated by two 'grave old angels,' who were 'plain'—something, no doubt, very different in all respects from the image we are accustomed to associate with the word 'angel.' The Satan too of this work is a poor production. Instead of the fine conception of a subtle but perverted intellectuality, we have a cringing, cowering, weakly-plaintive dragon, without a vestige of the resistant energy involved in the very notion of a Satan, so splendidly developed both by Milton and by Mrs. Browning.

But when all has been said that can be said against the taste and style of this popular writer, there still remains an amount of undiscussed work that cannot fairly be passed by without a few words in the reverse sense. That the author has shown here and there a good lyric faculty of the literary or uninspired order is unquestionable; nor can it be

denied that she exhibited in her popular book a noteworthy share of those affinities with external nature that never fail to enrich tenfold poetry that is wealthy in other respects. In dealing with the more simple and obvious sentiments and emotions she showed a farther aptitude; and these three features seemed promising when first brought before the public. But later work does not bear out the promise; and the features in question have no sufficient prominence to support a high literary standing. That they all exist may be seen without going beyond the three poems selected for censure. The lyric faculty is perhaps best shown in the charming song, 'When sparrows build, and leaves break forth' (in *Supper at the Mill*); and it is traceable in *Honours*, though the best verses of that poem show no more than a fair capacity to reproduce the metre and style of Tennyson's *Dream of Fair Women*. The first part of *Scholar and Carpenter* is full of little tender thoughts on nature and things living, and the last part has an admirably simple pathos in the Carpenter's story of his life: were it not for the faults already named and the conscious presence of *The Two Voices* in the preamble of intended subtleties, the poem might be valuable. Again, in a poem called *Light and Shade*, the beautiful legend of Persephone is treated at once with firmness of hand and nicety of lyric expression: these qualities, indeed, are exceedingly remarkable in the

piece, considering that it is evidently a study written on a set subject (that given in the title); and the ruin of so good a poem by the anti-classic vulgarity of the opening verse is subject for more regret than the vulgarest passages of Miss Ingelow's verse usually inspire in the critical bosom. The wide disparity between Miss Ingelow and Miss Smedley as followers of Tennyson is striking: Miss Smedley has exquisite taste, whether she be writing in an imitative or in an original vein; and it is just the lack of that indispensable quality that has gone farthest to ruin Miss Ingelow's productions in both veins. It is to be feared now that this will always be so.

IV.

ROBERT BROWNING.

‘ From Browning some “ Pomegranate,” which, if cut deep down
the middle,
Shows a heart within blood-tinctured, of a veined humanity.’

E. B. BROWNING.

‘ The Critics say that epics have died out
With Agamemnon and the goat-nursed gods—
I’ll not believe it.’

E. B. BROWNING.

ROBERT BROWNING.

DURING the last thirty years men of science have been notably active in accumulating results such as have gone far to constitute a definite and invaluable science of psychology : year after year has seen some pinnacle or bastion added to the great edifice, and year after year the admitted importance of this branch of physiology has increased. Nowhere has the movement been more vigorously forwarded than in England, and in no other country is there so able an array of really scientific psychologists. It would be strange if there were no corresponding movement in the world of art—science and art being as they are so much more intimately connected than a mere superficial view of them would lead one to suppose ; and for the artistic equivalent of this scientific movement we should naturally look first to the head of the arts ; nor will he who looks there be disappointed. Whoever has followed out the history of poetry during the last thirty years must have observed a great change in the subjects selected for treatment, as well as in the manner of treating them. The entity

'nature,' which before the present era of poetry absorbed so large a proportion of our esthetic energies, has in its turn been absorbed by the real being, man; and the great bulk of poetic force is now brought to bear on the treatment of man, and of man alone—for whatever our poets now find to say about inanimate nature is not apostrophic, but has reference to nature merely in its bearings on man. Under these auspices the psychological school of poetry has been and is forming—having for many years consisted of the great master whose name heads this section and of dispersed results of his influence on many younger or lesser poets; for up to a comparatively recent time he alone devoted himself entirely to the admirable method of his own creation. Tennyson, as we have seen, has used the method at times, and always with fine results; but he has had too much work of another class to attend to to make his works in this kind of capital importance.

Browning, throughout his literary career, has applied strictly psychological principles both to the drama and to lyric poetry; and, until the wonderful application of those principles to work on an epic scale—the feat he last performed—his chief innovation lay in the construction of pieces which cannot properly be called lyrics, though often lyrical in metre. This innovation consisted chiefly in the confining of poetry entirely to the motions of the human soul,

and treating these with an unprecedented minuteness and carefulness of analysis, and with a special care to the adaptation of metre and rhythm to the exigencies of each subject. In the longer pieces, which are written in lyrical metres or blank verse, according to the subject, there is a large and what must be called greatly dramatic use of the monologue form. In each monologue some particular point of interest in the history of a human soul is taken up. The soul, whether historical or fictitious, generally speaks for itself all that is spoken—the artist invariably refraining from any appearance as a spokesman. In the course of the monologue all circumstances in the past development of the soul, which are available for illuminating the present point, are brought out, and the present and past action of other human beings on the speaker is indicated either by detail on the speaker's part, or by some such artifice as a sudden change in the tone of the monologue, from which we learn that the person addressed has said or done something; and sometimes the whole expression of the actual speaker is devoted to the analysis of another soul—the idealised reproduction of another character, or set of mental phenomena. This method of course affords a great compactness and symmetry to the series of circumstances relating to the particular mind under treatment; and the attention of the reader is to a large extent concen-

trated on that one soul, though it is quite possible to treat a plurality of souls ably in one monologue.

Now in *Pauline*, the poet's earliest known work, published anonymously, and called 'a fragment of a confession,' this principle is strictly adhered to; but the growth of the speaker's soul, and the various phases of sentiment and thought through which he has passed, are given at far too great a length to be thoroughly impressive: the texture is not close enough, and the poem is otherwise wanting in subsequently developed characteristics of Browning. Nevertheless it is a beautiful piece, and for a first attempt very powerful. Through all the long tale which the speaker tells to Pauline, we get no irrelevancies, no ruptures of unity, nothing to give the idea of a 'made-up' poem; but there is an over-evident influence of Shelley apparent in the style here and there, and the speaker often addresses some worshipped poet whom he calls 'Sun-treader,' and who seems to bear, in certain sketchy passages relating to him, a strong resemblance to Shelley;—so that, while one cannot but see a complete dramatic unity in the piece, an idea (perhaps a wild one) occasionally suggests itself, that the poet, elsewhere worshipful to Shelley, is dramatising himself—making his own confession and diverging into addresses to his own idol. If this were so, the fact would not render the piece anything other than a psychological

monologue: Browning's soul is quite as well worth analysing and dramatising as any soul he has taken up and sunk himself in; but what gives *Pauline* an air of improbability, as a dramatic piece, is the great minuteness of treatment—the particularity of psychological detail as compared with the breadth and generality of more mature works. Doubtless the piece was soon felt to be a failure by the rapidly growing intellect that had put it forth, and the next production was executed on a much easier plan, though it was still more ambitiously exhaustive; *Paracelsus* was devoted to the treatment of one soul equally with *Pauline*; but the end was compassed by means of open converse with other souls; and, though *Paracelsus* is the one theme, the other three characters of this dramatic poem are vital and interesting. After *Paracelsus* came a manifestation of analytical power in the five-act-drama form—*Strafford*; and then, in *Sordello*, a different method again was put to proof—the analytic narrative. In point of method no importance can be attached to *Sordello*; but the book is full enough of exquisite beauties and nice discriminations of the elements of character to support a considerable essay; and there is in it a luxuriant wealth of sonorous expression, suggestive of joy in a newly-discovered faculty. It is to be noted on the way that the Shelley flavour goes through *Paracelsus* and comes out with great strength in *Sordello*, rein-

vigorated by the magnificent originality of style developed by Browning in the mean time. In *Pippa Passes*, the very curious but very beautiful drama which came out next, there was a looming of monologue on a better plan than that of *Pauline*; but it was in the poet's next instalment of work that the conception of this form was first carried out in its integrity—in the piece then called *Italy*, but long ago re-christened *My Last Duchess*. In this piece, not only do we get a marvellously graphic portrait of an Italian ducal mind drawn by the duke's self, but the whole action and scenery are reflected from his speech as clearly as if the monologue were furnished with introduction, notes, and appendix. As we read the opening words—

'That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now'—

we see the nobleman, with indicative wave of hand, conduct his guest on to the fancied stage; and not less significant are the terminal lines—

'Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me.'

We see here at once the whole situation—how the Duke, showing the portrait of his late wife, is entertaining the emissary of his next wife's father: we see the pair rise, and in the 'Nay, we'll go together down, sir,' we see the courtly contention at the stair-head; and then we have the lingering descent of the stairs—the look-out of the window at the bronze in the palace court.

The collection of *Bells and Pomegranates* which contained this piece contained many others of the same integrity of method, though in some there is a greater preponderance of narrative element than we associate with the pure conception of the psychological monologue. Still the pieces containing this different distribution of elements do not depart in any sense from the method in question: some go back upon old reminiscence, and are thus more narrative in matter, while others are full of the actual situation, and are thus more dramatic in the ordinary acceptance of the word; but, forasmuch as in all to which I refer the artist has obviously performed the difficult task of self-elimination, all are dramatic; and inasmuch as the whole* are character-studies, whether of phases intellectual or phases emotional, all are strictly psychological. Almost every piece is a speech spoken from a single mouth.

* The most striking exception is the *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, perhaps the best known but least worth knowing of all Browning's poems.

Three years later, another relay of *Bells and Pomegranates* furnished a still richer sample of the capacities of the monologue form—even the commencement of the supreme poem *Saul* appearing among the rest. Since that time (1845), Browning has published no considerable works that are not in the monologue form, except *A Soul's Tragedy*, *Luria*, and *In a Balcony*. This last was the only very notable exception to the method in the collection of fifty poems called originally *Men and Women*, unless we are also to except the two great poems which are letters—*Karshish* and *Cleon*; and these are so thoroughly dramatic that it is unnecessary to except them. *Luria* and *In a Balcony* are perhaps the most perfect of Browning's plays, though neither is well adapted for modern stage purposes; and, after making the dramatic scene-form yield what it would in his hands to the enrichment of psychological art, the poet seems to have followed out with a striking unity of purpose the elaboration of his own peculiar monologue. Even *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*,* published five years earlier than the last play, is no exception; for it must be regarded as impersonal, just as the other religious monologues of Browning are impersonal. There may be a bias in it; but if there is it is not self-evident; and we could no more confidently attribute to Browning the position as-

* A poem in two monologues, with a large narrative element.

sumed by either of the two speakers in *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* than we could label him Roman Catholic on the strength of *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, Arabian sceptic on the evidence of the *Letter from Karshish*, or Pagan on the testimony of *Cleon*. In *Dramatis Personæ*, published nine years later than *Men and Women*, the dramatic form had entirely disappeared, and the book was simply a collection of monologues full of fresh variety in form, while in matter it was, as all its predecessors had been, a rich contribution of deep original thoughts and beautiful feelings infused into the pictured mental lives of so many more men and women, 'live or dead, or fashioned by the fancy' of the poet. And at length this series of labours in one direction has been crowned with that achievement which the commencement of the year 1869 saw completed—*The Ring and the Book*, a work in twelve psychological monologues, constituting not only a poem of the highest power and noblest aspiration, but also a great lesson on the adaptability of the strict monologue form for epic uses.

I believe there are many persons under the impression that these soul-studies of Browning's are for the most part verse of a purely intellectual class; but this is a great mistake; for, although subtlety of thought and keenness of intellect abound among the men and women of this poet's creation, a fervent

intensity in the emotional side of the human nature here depicted is almost more remarkable than the rarity of the intellectual atmosphere. And it is the emotional rather than the intellectual qualities that render Browning's *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personæ* the vital and perspicuous personalities that they are. They are beings of broadly-marked character, who, when once known, draw the reader to them in bonds of affection as Shakespeare's characters do; and the many remarkable thoughts they suggest to you in detail are not really as remarkable as the varied personalities themselves.

It is hard to tell which of these so many monologue-portraits are the best and most memorable; but it is perhaps safe to say that, of the historic characters in this method, the two master-pieces are portraits of two Italian painters—Fra Lippo Lippi and Andrea del Sarto; and both these poems are notable instances of what is said above in regard to the relative value of thoughts and personalities: both teem with fine thoughts on art and life; but, when one has laid these to heart and truly enjoyed them, it is, after all, the two painters themselves with whom one is brought into close contact, and who remain as firmly impressed on the heart and mind as persons met and loved in real life.

On near acquaintance with the poem *Fra Lippo*, it is impossible not to feel that the reading of the

monk's character for which Browning has reached across the centuries is absolutely true in essentials. What we are usually taught to remember about this painter is simply that he broke his monastic vows and ran away with a nun (or novice); but what is really memorable about this rebellious monk is doubtless his intense feeling for the beauty and meaning of objective phenomena, and his love for human nature independent of what is fantastically spiritual in the conceptions of his time. Thus, Browning gives us the portrait of the man for whom

'The world and life's too big to pass for a dream'—

the man whose mind is in advance of narrow monastic conceptions, and who, monk though he be, roundly confesses,

'For me, I think I speak as I was taught—
I always see the Garden and God there
A-making man's wife—and, my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.'

This appreciation of the 'value and significance of flesh'—so clearly evinced in the splendidly solid and vivid work of Lippo when placed beside the thin and ultra-spiritual pictures of his contemporaries—is no mark of mere grossness: it is really an earnest of the man's genial interest in human faces and forms, —an interest whereof the poet has given a masterly

specimen in a question put by his Frate to the functionary who has caught him out of bounds,

‘Have you noticed, now,
Your cullion’s hanging face? A bit of chalk,
And trust me but you should, though!’

Lippo and some few such as he are just the men who may fairly say,

‘This world’s no blot for us,
Nor blank—it means intensely, and means good:
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.’

And such spirits are not to be ranked meanly just because they may have followed their inevitable course in transgressing the narrow limits of conventual existence.

In *Andrea del Sarto* the sense of perfect mastery over the art of painting is rendered as finely as is in *Fra Lippo Lippi* the sense of strong struggle and development of an art very imperfect; and the character—one radically opposed to the Friar in most essentials—is given with even a greater completeness than is shown in the reproduction of the Friar’s character. If we love the strong, genial, humane Lippo, we cannot well love less the sensitive, tender-hearted, fragile Andrea—the man whose heart harboured conceptions of the most exquisite, whose hand embodied them with a perfect mastery; and who yet had not the strong self-sufficiency needed for any man who is to climb among the highest peaks of the art-world. It is easy to understand how a man whose concep-

tions were of the subtle and delicate beauty characteristic of Andrea's works should have been tied down to a lower place than was possible to him, simply by the power of an 'imperious whorish woman' to whose beauty he was a slave,—how the influence of such a woman might lead him to make his art a mere means of money-getting, to break his faith, rob his patron, and even put up with such half-love as he was able to extort from her. There is something unspeakably sad (and true in its sadness) in that passage of Browning's poem where Andrea compares himself with Raphael, and half reproaches the insatiate Lucrezia with her failure to influence him aright :

'Yonder's a work, now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago.
(*'Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.*)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that Heaven might so replenish him,
Above and through his art—for it gives way;
That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak! its soul is right,
He means right—that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it.
But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
Out of me! out of me! And wherefore out?
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you.'

At this point in the monologue we get one of those admirable turns of speech implying the presence of the person addressed; for here Andrea changes his

tone to one of deprecation, and it is implied that his wife has answered him with pique: he goes on—

'Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think—
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare—
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
"God and the glory! never care for gain.
The present by the future, what is that?
Live for fame, side by side with Angelo—
Raphael is waiting. Up to God all three!"
I might have done it for you. So it seems—
Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.'

All this is exceedingly characteristic; and the last weakness of putting one's faults and failures down to God is specially appropriate as an imputation against poor Andrea.

I am not aware that any one has noticed publicly the striking correspondence between the character of Andrea as condensed into this verbal portrait, and the external semblance of the painter as shown by himself in that triumph of art, his own portrait, preserved in the National Gallery. But to me it seems impossible to think of the poem and the picture apart; so completely do they unite to form one personality. The spiritual beauty of the brow and eyes, with their look of care and depression, the grand capacity of the head, the delicate weakness of the cloven chin, the sensuousness of the mouth, the

might of the firm large hands, the perceptibly sordid stoop of the noble neck, the exquisitely refined taste of the costume's colour and form, and the wholly craftsmanlike moulding of all these traits into a perfect picture, speak so distinctly of the soul that utters its own portrait in the monologue, that one is disposed to suspect the poet must have known the picture when he and it were both inmates of Florence. The point is an interesting one; for of all the poet's monologues this of the 'faultless painter' is perhaps the most nearly faultless, and of all portraits that artists have left us of themselves none is more touching or exquisite than Andrea's in the National Gallery: nor is it strange that while the poet's work remains in the mind with the material colouring of the painter's, the painter's inevitably suggests the psychological colouring of the poet's.

The catholic sympathy shown in reproducing with equal vividness two lives so alien in the art-world as these two never fails the poet when he goes out of himself into the world of religious and philosophic sentiment and thought. Whether his speaker be the Roman-catholic bishop who finds it convenient to remain in the faith, and justifies himself to himself with sophistic satisfaction, or the Arabian physician who, struck almost to conviction by the tale of Lazarus, yet writes of it to his fellow practitioner as a 'crazy tale,' interesting when probed by

medical insight, there is the same completeness of characterisation, arising from perfect identification with the character. Whether he places himself at the standpoint of the Greek artist, poet, and philosopher who writes to his tyrant dismissing the pretensions of Paul and his followers with all the aristocracy of intellect and cultivation, or becomes for the nonce the dying Evangelist John, there is the same distinct human value attaching itself to the one set of thoughts as to the other. And while in *Saul* the young enthusiast David is represented as conceiving originally the two sublime ideas of future existence for the soul and redemption by the Son of God made flesh, an opposite extreme is reached in *Caliban upon Setebos*, when the 'moon-calf' delivers his splendid theological scheme, and ends his gross conceptions in 'natural theology' by grovelling in terror at an approaching storm. In all these cases, and in fact in every other instance in which the poet has touched the various-toned strings of religious thought, the particular ideas are not merely set in order but intimately felt; and the main outcome is always a solid personality: the reasonings pass out of the mind, but the men remain fixed there; and what is of the utmost importance in appraising this poetry is that the same is true of the men and women who are made the vehicles of the simpler phases of sentiment and passion. *Porphyria's Lover* sitting by his murdered

mistress, telling the tale of his great love and terrible cure for doubt, is no less a man than that Cleon who could say with arrogant truth that 'all arts' were his, and who had

'written three books on the soul,
Proving absurd all written hitherto,
And putting us to ignorance again;'

and 'James Lee's' neglected wife, with her 'coarse hanks of hair,' is neither more nor less vital and interesting than Abt Vogler 'after he had been extemporising upon the musical instrument of his invention,' and has paused to deliver his soul of an exquisite burden of thought on music.

It was long the fashion among the shallower 'critics' of the day to lose no available opportunity for a gird at the darknesses of *Sordello* and the drynesses of *Paracelsus*, works which none the less will remain high in sight long after the world has let slip the remembrance that the nineteenth century boasted a race of 'critics' so blind as to think slightly of the profoundest contemporary poetic intellect. Even after it became heterodox to sneer openly at these poems, the shortness of the poet's best-known works served as a stand-point for detractors; but that stand-point was finally abolished by *The Ring and the Book*. It is true there were remarks here and there on the 'awkwardness,' 'ungainliness,' &c. of the form; but we are not likely to hear more of this. It is doubtless

here that the poet has produced his *chef-d'œuvre* as regards both might of conception and form of embodiment: we have already followed the lines in which the form of the psychological epic has grown up from that of the monologue; and, having seen something of the difficulty and excellence of the monologue form, we can estimate to some extent the magnitude of Browning's achievement in producing *The Ring and the Book*. For in this undertaking he did not content himself with merging his personality in a single soul; but finding a subject rich in characters, in vivid variety of life, in complex mental phenomena to explore at will, he wove for us a series of monologues, each perfectly stable by itself and clear as to its own speaker and situation, and yet all so firmly welded together as to be an indivisible unity. The book is replete with the finest qualities of former works by the same hand (except the lark-like singing of *Sordello*, which but rarely comes uppermost here); and no estimate of Browning's works could be anything but the most incomplete without a somewhat full account of this latest and greatest of them. Let us therefore look at the general scheme of the book, its material and origin, and such of the individual sections as seem most important.

First of all, a word or two about the title may not be out of place. This must not be deemed fantastic, as resting on the mere image of a goldsmith making

a work of smithcraft out of pure gold, by transfusion of the metal with alloy, and fitting it

'To bear the file's tooth and the hammer's tap:
Since hammer needs must widen out the round,
And file emboss it fine with lily-flowers,
Ere the stuff grow a ring-thing right to wear.'

It is necessary to look behind this image for the true significance of the title, and to consult the inscription which 'grateful Florence' placed on Casa Guidi, in memory of the former inmate Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who made, in the words of the inscription, 'del suo verso aureo anello fra Italia e Inghilterra.' From the gold of this old Roman murder-case Browning has made a ring, which he aspires to place as strengthening the former tie between England and Italy—adding another bond to the sympathies so often and so strongly awakened by the poetess with fiery bursts of lyric poetry. The expression of this aspiration closes *The Ring and the Book*:

'And save the soul! If this intent save mine,—
If the rough ore be rounded to a ring,
Render all duty which good ring should do,
And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship,—
Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,
Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)
Linking our England to his Italy!'

In the first book the poet tells us how he found one day on a stall, while walking through Florence, an 'old square yellow book' of printed and written documents, relating to the trial of a Count Guido

Franceschini 'and certain four, the cut-throats in his pay,' for the murder of his wife Pompilia with her putative parents Pietro and Violante Comparini: he tells how he sought and failed to find other records of the trial, and how, finding that all trace of what had once been bruited widely over Europe had clean gone from the minds of men, he determined to 'let this old woe step on the stage again,' because, as he says, in digging out the sense of the book bit by bit (for it was partly in bad Latin, though partly in Italian), he had 'assayed and knew' his 'piecemeal gain was gold.' The foundation of fact found in this old book is not long to narrate, being simply what is chronicled about the trial. The main facts not disputed are—that Guido married Pompilia at Rome, and took her home to his palace at Arezzo, with her putative parents, the Comparini—that the Comparini left Arezzo and returned to Rome—that after a while Pompilia followed them to Rome in the company of a young priest, Giuseppe Caponsacchi, and there gave birth to a child—that Guido then came to Rome with four accomplices and murdered both wife and parents-in-law—that thereon ensued the trial whereof the sole record is this 'old square yellow book'—that an appeal was made to the Pope after condemnation of the murderers by the civil court, and that, on the Pope's judgment in the same sense being given, the murderers were—

‘put to death
By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,
At Rome on February Twenty Two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight.’

The allegations made on Guido's side are—that the Comparini palmed off upon the Count a girl not their own at all, but purchased by Violante from a prostitute in Rome—that, being discontented with the life at Arezzo, they returned to Rome and published this infamous transaction, partly out of spite, and partly to avoid payment of dowry—that Pompilia had held adulterous converse with the priest at Arezzo, and that finally, drugging Guido and his household, and laying hands on whatsoever property came nearest, she eloped with the priest, and gave birth eight months later to *his* child. For this catalogue of crimes, say Guido and his friends, the three lives were made to expiate, to the satisfaction of wounded honour.

The assertions on the other side are—that Guido obtained Pompilia and dowry on false representation of his *bien-être*, inducing the Comparini to come to Arezzo on the same representation—that when there he did his worst to worry the old couple to death, and exhibited an unmitigated hate for the young Pompilia—that he tried all he could to involve his wife with the priest—that she did use the said priest's services to make good her flight, out of pure fear of the Count's brutalities, and without any fault what-

ever on her part—and that Guido committed the murder only when he felt that he might gratify his hate without prejudice to his monetary prospects, namely, when Pompilia had an heir to whom the property of the Comparini would descend, and who would be under his power. ‘This,’ we are told,

‘In the bookful; thus far take the truth,
The untampered gold, the fact untampered with,
The mere ring-metal ere the ring be made!’

The poet's next step in his prelude address to the public is to recount how, closing the book, he proceeded to realise the whole tragedy from first to last—to fuse his ‘live soul with that inert stuff;’ and for power of diction and vividness of feeling there is scarcely a finer passage in the work than this wherein we learn how, after the meagre black and white of the trial had been duly coned, the tragedy presented itself in fulness of form and richness of colour and amplitude of detail to a mind foremost among our poetic minds at this time in knowledge of the human heart and of human motive. A comparison of what Browning calls ‘the bookful’ with what he realises after he has shut the book will yield some notion of the power of a pure and noble fancy; and no doubt the dramatic account given of the genesis of this poem really represents the process of transfiguration from bare fact to artistic fiction (or whatever you please to call the result). The story

gathered from the old book, as it stands with its rags and tatters of human frailty obtruded everywhere, would scarcely be deemed edifying: it is only when the poet has pared off the rags and tatters, and brought forward the truths and treasures which only eyes such as his have power to discern beneath, that Beauty comes with edification in her train. Fact alone is often gross and unedifying; but fact with fancy may be, and in the hands of a great poet *must* be, quite the reverse, insomuch as to justify Browning's own dictum—

'Fancy with fact is just one fact the more;
To-wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced,
Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else free,
As right through ring and ring runs the djereed
And binds the loose, one bar without a break.'

Next to the account of the realisation of the facts by his own powers of fancy, we get a brief reasoned analysis of the whole tragedy, as conceived by the poet—the view of the matter which *he* sees good reason for selecting from among the conflicting views shown in the bare book.

After describing the germ of the poem in its growth from fact to art, he tells us how he means to put the whole before us—enumerates the ten speeches which, with his own prologue and epilogue, are to 'round the ring,' and places the speakers before us as fleshly as art can place, with their surroundings. The mere arrangement of these monologues is strik-

ingly strong and effective. First is the speech of a citizen representing that half of contemporary Rome which sympathises with the Count; and next speaks he who represents 'the other half Rome,' convinced of the blamelessness of Pompilia and the infamy of Guido: these two speeches show one-sided strong feeling, but no niceness of reasoning; while the third book is a discriminative discussion of the matter on neutral grounds, spoken by a 'person of quality,' representing the class

'Who care to sift a business to the bran,
Nor coarsely bolt it like the simpler sort.'

Then come in succession Guido's defence made up of lies, with Caponsacchi's and Pompilia's statements made up of truth; next, the first lawyer-pleading for Guido, and the last against him; then the Pope's debate with his own soul, resulting in the judgment against the murderers; and lastly Guido's speech after he has heard the doom—speech wherein he tells no more lies, but gives us the naked hideous truth.

In this introductory book, then, the poet dramatises his own dramatic mind, and the situation taken up is the genesis of a great dramatic work. Throughout this book the figure prominently before us is Browning—Browning as he draws his subject to him, and thrusts it at arm's-length again—Browning as he dives through what would be mud to a muddy

mind, and brings up, by help of his clear vision, all the hidden beauties to be found in any complex human subject—Browning as he revels in his art and in his power as a medium between contemporary humanity and the lost treasures of human grief and passion and splendour of devotion, which he deems he has found in the records of this forgotten case. Not on a first reading is it fully apparent that the poet has handled his own soul in so splendid a manner, and embodied it in such a graphic and speaking legacy to posterity; but whoever takes the trouble to dwell a little with this first division of *The Ring and the Book* will probably find that we have here a revelation of the poet as man and artist, such as it were well to possess of all great poets—such as we have not even of our great, grand, impersonal Shakespeare. I repeat ‘as man and artist,’ because it seems certain that no sympathetic soul could fail, on due attention, to feel to the utmost depth the strength, purity, and manliness of the whole—the strong pathos of the poet’s outbreathings which relate to his own life, and the entire absence from them of anything morbid, such as one generally finds in personal verse. Browning has often a grotesque way of putting things, clearly not intended as in any way comical, but part and parcel of his style, and not incompatible with seriousness, or even pathos; and in the three passages in which he speaks openly to his countrymen, address-

ing them as 'British Public,' we cannot but feel the oddness of his expressions as the artifice of a strong soul to hide a pain which might be thought maudlin if expressed in anything but language the most muscular—a pain at the comparative neglect wherein his works lay for many years. It would be absurd for a man of superb abilities to affect ignorance of them; and, feeling them, it would be equally absurd to profess indifference whether they are recognised; and there is a profound pathos combined with a healthy independence of tone in these personal passages addressed to the British public by one whose habit of writing is entirely impersonal. At the end of the introductory book one of these passages is linked with an address to his poet-wife—than which it would be hard to find anything more beautiful or more touching:

'Such, British Public, ye who like me not,
 (God love you!)—whom I yet have laboured for,
 Perchance more careful whoso runs may read
 Than erst when all, it seemed, could read who ran,—
 Perchance more careless whoso reads may praise
 Than late when he who praised and read and wrote
 Was apt to find himself the self-same me,—
 Such labour had such issue, so I wrought
 This arc, by furtherance of such alloy,
 And so, by one spirt, take away its trace
 Till, justifiably golden, rounds my ring.

A ring without a posy, and that ring mine?

O lyric love, half-angel and half-bird
 And all a wonder and a wild desire,—
 Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,

Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
 And sang a kindred soul out to his face,—
 Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—
 When the first summons from the darkling earth
 Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
 And bared them of the glory—to drop down,
 To toil for man, to suffer or to die,—
 This is the same voice : can thy soul know change ?
 Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help !
 Never may I commence my song, my due
 To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
 Except with bent head and beseeching hand—
 That still, despite the distance and the dark,
 What was, again may be ; some interchange
 Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
 Some benediction anciently thy smile :
 —Never conclude, but raising hand and head
 Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
 For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
 Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back
 In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
 Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
 Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall !

To say which of the twelve books of this poem is the most perfect in depth and breadth of dramatic conception or in mastery over the peculiar form of dramatic expression—which shows the deepest insight into the human heart or the highest powers of imagination—would be a hard matter ; but it is not difficult to separate the monologues of primary importance from those to be regarded as accessory. The principal ones beside this introductory one of the poet's own are those of the actors in the tragedy and that of Pope Innocent XII., on whose judgment the murderers were put to death. The opposed outpourings of divided unreasoning Rome with the critical

analysis of reasoning Rome, as well as the special-pleadings of the men of law, and the comparatively slight epilogue, are of secondary importance.

The first of the main characters who addresses us in person is Count Guido Franceschini, as he appears before the judges and stands on his defence. No clownish, dull-witted piece of mere brutality is this Count, but a clear-headed man of the world, far above the average in abilities—a man who lives and has lived for ‘the world,’ in the conventional acceptance of that term, and whose ideas all centre round worldly advantage—a man to whose *heart* religion is unknown in any form, but whose *intellect* has yet appraised and considered it in many forms, and finally cast it out, choosing that worse part which he is never able to make as entirely his own as he would wish. He is before all things mean-hearted—unsympathetic to the point of cruel cynicism: *narrow-minded* he cannot in any sense be called; and his acuteness of intellect, coupled with a wide knowledge of the ways of the world, enables him to place his conduct before his judges in a startlingly different light from that which we feel to be the true light. The one thing he respects is his own long line of ancestry; and even here his respect is in proportion probably to the amount of advantage a long line of ancestry gives a man in contact with his fellows. He professes to regard the marital contract with Pompilia as a simple

mercantile transaction, in which he traded his rank and position for so much youth, beauty, and money; and in the mouth of such a man such a profession affords a plausible foundation from which to build the grievances erected in his defence; nevertheless, throughout this defence the reader's heart is firm in the faith that, for all the muscular grasp of the man on each trait convertible to his uses, the fair fame of Pompilia and the priest is not suffering in the judges' eyes. Through all the wily fluency of the Count—through all his rhetorical flashes of wounded honour and manhood—through even his occasional outpourings of argument based on religion, we discern the serpentine subtlety of that unrivalled piece of specious falsity, a heartless and unprincipled Italian of intellect. Whether flowers of rhetoric deck the speech or breaths of humanitarian or devout sentiment expire from it, there leers the serpent's eye or hisses the serpent's tongue. The man is put so vividly before us, not only here in his own speech but also in dashing touches of Browning's speech, that we cannot but feel his utter falsity and ineradicable cruelty, even through passages of superb poetry, such as the account of his waiting at Rome before the murder:

'Festive bells—everywhere the Feast o' the Babe,
Joy upon earth, peace and goodwill to man!
I am baptised. I started and let drop
The dagger. "Where is it, His promised peace?"

Nine days o' the Birth-Feast did I pause and pray
 To enter into no temptation more.
 I bore the hateful house, my brother's once,
 Deserted,—let the ghost of social joy
 Mock and make mouths at me from empty room
 And idle door that missed the master's step,—
 Bore the frank wonder of incredulous eyes,
 As my own people watched without a word,
 Waited, from where they huddled round the hearth
 Black like all else, that nod so slow to come—
 I stopped my ears even to the inner call
 Of the dread duty, heard only the song
 "Peace upon earth," saw nothing but the face
 O' the Holy Infant and the halo there
 Able to cover yet another face
 Behind it, Satan's, which I else should see.
 But, day by day, joy waned and withered off:
 The Babe's face, premature with peak and pine,
 Sank into wrinkled ruinous old age,
 Suffering and death, then mist-like disappeared,
 And showed only the Cross at end of all,
 Left nothing more to interpose 'twixt me
 And the dread duty,—for the angels' song,
 "Peace upon earth," louder and louder pealed,
 "O Lord, how long, how long be unavenged?"

Exquisite as this is, it is almost surpassed by the
 magnificent fury of what follows when the Count tells
 of his arrival at the villa of the Comparini, certain;
 as he says, of nothing 'save the will to do right, and
 the daring aught save leave right undone,'—tells of
 his unbridled wrath when Violante opens the door to
 him:

'And then,—why, even then, I think,
 I' the minute that confirmed my worst of fears,
 Surely,—I pray God that I think aright!—
 Had but Pompilia's self, the tender thing
 Who once was good and pure, was once my lamb
 And lay in my bosom, had the well-known shape
 Fronted me in the door-way,—stood there faint

With the recent pang, perhaps, of giving birth
 To what might, though by miracle, seem my child,—
 Nay more, I will say, had even the aged fool
 Pietro, the dotard, in whom folly and age
 Wrought, more than enmity or malevolence,
 To practise and conspire against my peace,—
 Had either of these but opened, I had paused.
 But it was she the hag, she that brought hell
 For a dowry with her to her husband's house,
 She the mock-mother, she that made the match
 And married me to perdition, spring and source
 O' the fire inside me that boiled up from heart
 To brain and hailed the Fury gave it birth,—
 Violante Comparini, she it was,
 With the old grin amid the wrinkles yet,
 Opened : as if in turning from the Cross,
 With trust to keep the sight and save my soul,
 I had stumbled, first thing, on the serpent's head
 Coiled with a leer at foot of it.

There was the end !

Then was I rapt away by the impulse, one
 Immeasurable everlasting wave of a need
 To abolish that detested life. 'Twas done :
 You know the rest and how the folds o' the thing,
 Twisting for help, involved the other two
 More or less serpent-like : how I was mad,
 Blind, stamped on all, the earth-worms with the asp,
 And ended so.'

It is in such passages as this that we learn how terrible an enemy Pompilia and Caponsacchi had to meet ; and again in his address to the Cardinal and Abate sent to apprise him of the Pope's judgment there are passages which enforce the same estimate of the Count's intellectual abilities, and even show up his power of mind in a still more favourable light ; for it is in that second address that he casts off all invention of subtle pleas, and defends his crime on the admission of Pompilia's innocence — speaks as

one who has nothing more to gain by lying, and endeavours by a long array of common-sense arguments to gain the intercession of the Cardinal and Abate. He maintains throughout a perfect hardihood and even indifference as to his execution, and on one occasion refers to his forfeited head as 'flung with a flourish;' and no doubt this is a true conception of such a character—to whom some palpable evidence of the desperateness of his case would be necessary before he could realise the terrors of impending death. With all his subtlety and acuteness he is not a man who has been in the habit of realising abstract positions: a man who did this would not commit the barbarities of Count Guido, from sheer pain of realising the victim's pain; nor could he plan deliberately such a marital barter as the Count's, from sheer discomfort of realising the mutual discomfort of a loveless wedding between an elderly man and a girl of thirteen, entirely unknown to each other: he is too heartless, too violent in his hatreds, too quick in his subtleties for complete and calm realisation, and is therefore able to contemplate his own death with indifference, until he actually becomes aware of the preparations being made outside for his march to the scaffold.

A character like this is a fine subject for a violent transition from outspoken, fearless hate, to terrible, heartrending pleading for life; and in the whole range

of literature, probably, such a situation has never been so powerfully handled as here. In the following passage, which is the last of Count Guido's voice, note specially the artistic splendour of the climax, the final shriek to the murdered wife :

'Nor is it in me to un hate my hates,—
 I use up my last strength to strike once more
 Old Pietro in the wine-house-gossip-face,
 To trample under foot the whine and wile
 Of that Violante,—and I grow one gorge
 To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale
 Poison my hasty hunger took for food.
 A strong tree wants no wreaths about its trunk,
 No cloying cups, no sickly sweet of scent,
 But sustenance at root, a bucketful.
 How else lived that Athenian who died so,
 Drinking hot bull's blood, fit for men like me?
 I lived and died a man, and take man's chance,
 Honest and bold: right will be done to such.

Who are these you have let descend my stair?
 Ha, their accursed psalm! Lights at the sill!
 Is it "Open" they dare bid you? Treachery!
 Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while
 Out of the world of words I had to say?
 Not one word! All was folly—I laughed and mocked!
 Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie,
 Is—save me notwithstanding! Life is all!
 I was just stark mad,—let the madman live
 Pressed by as many chains as you please pile!
 Don't open! Hold me from them! I am yours,
 I am the Grandduke's—no, I am the Pope's!
 Abate,—Cardinal,—Christ,—Maria,—God, . . .
 Pompilia, will you let them murder me?

The whole of Guido's second speech, and especially this last portion, gives us the revelation of a blackened nature which is yet so intensely human in its ways and manners, and even in some of its foibles

and cruelties, that we cannot but follow the intellectual clevernesses of the Count with an interest at times widening into pity. We are made to feel in the treatment of Guido that, though he is brutal, unprincipled, treacherous, and malignant, there are even for him antecedent and surrounding circumstances, not under his control, which have helped him to develop into abnormal prominence the bad elements of his nature, and suppress almost utterly the good—that each of our human selves is conscious of petty weaknesses and small sins such as might, under circumstances less favourable than ours, have led to results difficult to estimate and place definitely below the crimes of Guido; and even for the villanous Count the poet claims and gains our pity, with a sigh to boot, that the crafty criminal's intellectuality and energy of character should have missed employment for good instead of evil. It is by artistically letting Guido speak last that the hardening of our hearts against one so ferocious is avoided. Had the harrowing details of the murder or any of the resultant miseries come after the picture of the poor cringing Count as he realises for the first time the impending execution, it would have been hard to spare him the sigh we can now give for the wild desperation of his cry for life.

But, valuable as are Guido's two speeches as a complete study of character under varying circum-

stances, *The Ring and the Book* would hardly be the grand work it is, from an ethic as well as an esthetic point of view, had this depraved character been embodied thus completely for the mere sake of what was to be learned by the study of him, or for the mere pleasure of producing or contemplating a creation of unprecedented complexity and almost unrivalled finish. The Count serves a nobler purpose in the influence his energetic wickedness has in evoking the supreme beauties of character and action latent in the simply-lovely being Pompilia and the young priest of only half-developed soul. Caponsacchi at the time of his contact with Guido is a young man of fine abilities and pure life enough, but not of a systematically serious and contemplative mind: he is a priest, indeed, who has accepted the priesthood after having certain scruples, incident to a fresh integrity of soul, satisfied by representation of those who should have been his best advisers, but who persuaded him that the service of the Church demanded no strait-laced conformity to the letter of the priestly oaths. He is prone to take for truth what comes with the breath of authority; and the sceptical attitude is not consonant with his nature until he is forcibly aroused to question not only stated facts, but principles felt under ordinary circumstances to be binding. He is a youth, in fact, doing without trouble of heart or mind the duties

represented by a worldly episcopacy as those of a priest, and not the deeds of self-devotedness whereof his nature is capable if roused. His whole career indicates a man of marked impressibility — not a man given to calm reasoning. When his time comes to take the ecclesiastical oaths, these impress him as *real* and not as matter of empty breath, and he feels that he is but ill prepared to perform them. He does not of his own forethought turn and twist them to find a sense wherein they may be laxly understood; but there comes to his assistance the counter-impression of an authoritative hierarchy, declaring in favour of his aptitude for priest's duties—whereupon he is content to cast in his lot with a church which has his profound reverence. In matters of debate he regards the inward voice that asserts the greatest sway over his feelings; and being of a manly, unselfish nature, the result under due stress of circumstance is sure to be great and noteworthy. So it comes about that, when Guido forges letters purporting to be Pompilia's, begging the priest for love and help, he is not moved to think meanly of her: he has *seen* her once in a public place, and so strongly is he possessed of a feeling of incongruity between the transparent purity of her exterior and the baseness of these letters, that he unhesitatingly brushes aside all suspicion of her and pierces at once to the heart of the fraud. Guido's machinations serve

however to rouse thoroughly Caponsacchi's fire and energy; and when at last he goes on a forged solicitation to Pompilia's window, it is with mind prepared and muscles braced to pull out and belabour the forger if need be. Then it is that he actually meets Pompilia; and learning that the Count has also been carrying on a counter-forgery of letters to his wife, the whole man is roused to grant the assistance she beseeches him to give her in escaping from the usage she is undergoing, even though he have to cast to the winds all thought of how the gossips of Arezzo may interpret the flight of wife and priest. He accepts at once the truth of all she tells him, is convinced of the necessity to save her, makes the needful preparations, and carries out this breach of priestly discipline. The natural proneness to accept authority save under strong emotional conviction comes back when he is relegated for this escapade: he submits calmly, and when summoned to give evidence on the trial he obeys; but as he warms to the discussion of the murder his whole soul boils over in eloquent vindication of Pompilia and execration of Guido. Unawed by the august presence of judges, he stands as a man addressing men; and such a man as he whose heart is here laid bare it is hardly ever our lot to encounter whether in art or in life. The poet's manner in this speech is subtly modified to the occasion: instead of the flow of well-considered

argumentative eloquence which we get from Guido, there is here a short, direct, vivid manner of narration, while the speaker is calmly giving evidence; but, as soon as he comes to points at which he is deeply moved at heart, up wells the fervid oratory of nature, as for instance in the passage wherein he speaks of the murderer's appropriate punishment, and conceives him as meeting Judas Iscariot after being 'pushed by the general horror and common hate' from all 'honest forms of life,' till left 'not to die so much as *slide out of life*.'

'And thus I see him slowly and surely edged
 Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
 Aspiring to be immortality,
 As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance,
 Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, slidders down
 Hill-side, lies low and prostrate on the smooth
 Level of the outer place, lapsed in the vale:
 So I lose Guido in the loneliness,
 Silence and dusk, till at the doleful end,
 At the horizontal line, creation's verge,
 From what just is to absolute nothingness—
 Lo, what is this he meets, strains onward still?
 What other man deep further in the fate,
 Who, turning at the prize of a footfall
 To flatter him and promise fellowship,
 Discovers in the act a frightful face—
 Judas, made monstrous by much solitude!
 The two are at one now! Let them love *their love*
 That bites and claws like hate, or hate *their hate*
 That mops and mows and makes as it were love!
 There, let them each tear each in devil's fun,
 Or fondle this the other while malice aches—
 Both teach, both learn detestability!
 Kiss him the kiss, Iscariot! Pay that back,
 That smatch o' the slaver blistering on your lip—
 By the better trick, the insult he spared Christ—

Lure him the lure o' the letters, Aretine!
 Lick him o'er slimy-smooth with jelly-filth
 O' the verse-and-prose pollution in love's guise!
 The cockatrice is with the basilisk!
 There let them grapple, denizens o' the dark,
 Foes or friends, but indissolubly bound,
 In their one spot out of the ken of God
 Or care of man, for ever and ever more!

This eloquent burst serves to call up the scene of the priest's examination so vividly painted in the first book; and we have the suggestion of the judges, culpably neglectful at a former stage of the proceedings, cowering before the terrible tide of truth and emotion sweeping straight from the heart of a noble and outraged man who knows no guile. But perhaps the highest utterance of this man is the pathetic close of his address, wherein much subtle and exquisite sentiment follows the sad burden,

'You see, we are
 So very pitiable, she and I,
 Who had conceivably been otherwise.'

There is very little poetry of the present day more beautiful in aspiration or expression than these few final lines,—

'To have to do with nothing but the true,
 The good, the eternal—and these, not alone
 In the main current of the general life,
 But small experiences of every day,
 Concerns of the particular hearth and home:
 To learn not only by a comet's rush
 But a rose's birth,—not by the grandeur, God—
 But the comfort, Christ. All this, how far away!
 Mere delectation, meet for a minute's dream!—
 Just as a drudging student trims his lamp,
 Opens his Plutarch, puts him in the place

Of Roman, Grecian ; draws the patched gown close,
Dreams, "Thus should I fight, save or rule the world!"—
Then smilingly, contentedly, awakes
To the old solitary nothingness.
So I, from such communion, pass content.'

And yet what a deep pathos of *content* is revealed in the one only line that follows,—

'O great, just, good God ! Miserable me !'

Pompilia's character is one which makes analysis a superfluity by reason of its mere simple purity. Every utterance of hers is at once child-like and womanly, and comes fresh from a soul to which evil is unknown save as an infliction from without, while she has yet the full tale of womanly emotions. Standing between Guido and Caponsacchi, she is a perfect example at once of feminine endurance and of the power a fine woman-nature has over a fine man-nature. Whoever reads her speech will feel more or less the inexpressible something which not only conquers the educated and scrupulous Canon and draws to her the simple-minded Augustinian Friar who acts as her confessor, but also sways towards her all who enter the hospital where her four days' dying is accomplished. The most complete description of Pompilia is that given in the first book in three words—'young, good, beautiful.' The last two epithets are hard to define ; but we can feel almost infallibly, on close contact, whether they apply to a person or a work of art ; and thus, with Pompilia,

every reader must know, before he has turned many pages of her death-bed speech, that he is reading good and beautiful poetry, which places him face to face with a good and beautiful soul. She is charmingly simple when she tells of the first visit of Guido; and there is an irresistible fragrance and freshness of girlhood, able to survive all the terrible troubles of the young wife, in the little tale she tells of her very young days—how she and a neighbour's child played at finding each other out in a tapestry representing a hunt of Diana. Note the loveliness of her remembered injunction to her playmate:—

‘Tisbe, that is you,
With half-moon on your hair-knot, spear in hand,
Flying, but no wings, only the great scarf
Blown to a bluish rainbow at your back:
Call off your hound and leave the stag alone!’

But it is when she speaks of her newly-born baby that the most touching loveliness of her nature is shown: her thankfulness that he was born and safely hidden before the murder, her perfect little touches of remembrance of what gossips have said to comfort her for his loss, her tender surmises as to what he may grow to think of his dead young mother, and her apt comparison of herself to the ‘poor virgin at our street-corner in a lonely niche—the babe, that sat upon her knees, broke off,’—all these matters bring her out in exquisite relief against the hideous background of her circumstances.

In the mouth of the Pope, who takes so important a position in the book, Browning places judgments and sentiments which seem to correspond with those whereof he has delivered himself at starting; and beautifully does the noble old man here painted express himself on Pompilia, whom he calls—

‘My rose I gather for the breast of God.’

In the breast of the Augustinian Friar, too, her sweetness germinates; and a piece of notable eloquence exists in what the poet has saved, in his epilogue, of the Friar’s funeral sermon: especially fine are the following lines,—

‘Because Pompilia’s purity prevails,
Conclude you, all truth triumphs in the end?
So might those old inhabitants of the ark,
Witnessing haply their dove’s safe return,
Pronounce there was no danger all the while
O’ the deluge, to the creature’s counterparts,
Aught that beat wing i’ the world, was white or soft,—
And that the lark, the thrush, the culver too,
Might equally have traversed air, found earth,
And brought back olive-branch in unharmed bill.
Methinks I hear the Patriarch’s warning voice—
“Though this one breast, by miracle, return,
No wave rolls by, in all the waste, but bears
Within it some dead dove-like thing as dear,
Beauty made blank and harmlessness destroyed!”’

Pompilia will take rank among the highest of the great women of art—beside Imogen and Juliet, our ‘sweetest kin on art’s side.’ Never was a character of greater solidity and clearness built of materials so simple. Complex enough are the surrounding cha-

racters and scenery; but nothing in healthy psychology can be less complex than this absolute piece of feminine integrity, displaying in every word of her mouth and at every turn of her sad history some trait of a being

‘ Perfect, white and clean
Outside as inside, soul and soul’s demesne.’

Like Caponsacchi, Pompilia is so little dependent on anything but nobility of character and treatment for the interest she excites, the exquisite pleasure her speech yields, and the genuine help to be got from it in breasting the troubles of every day, that one may feel confident in the efficiency of time to make this work a popular poem—so far at least as these two books of it are concerned. It will only be necessary for the book to become widely known and circulated at a comparatively cheap rate for it to address itself, not to the limited circle who have hitherto been close readers of Browning, not even to the less limited circle who read for fashion’s sake a great deal of modern poetry to the exclusion of Browning, but to the limitless circle for whom shilling Shakespeares are printed—the wide class whose education fits them for the appreciation of whatever addresses itself to profound human feelings, though perhaps leaving them unable to appreciate the intellectual subtleties so frequently and finely embodied by the same poet.

Whether *The Ring and the Book* has been a

'success' in the ordinary sense, this is no place to discuss; in the highest sense it certainly is. The poet himself seems not unhopeful in the words,

'British Public, who may like me yet,
(Marry and amen!),'—

and, though he has certainly not done his genius the violence of adopting aught from the popular style of the day, he has evidently laboured much to make his meaning perfectly clear in this last work. If a full popularity come in the poet's lifetime, well! 'If not, well also, but not so well.' Be it borne in mind that

'what the poet writes,
He writes: mankind accepts it if it suits,
And that's success: if not, the poem's passed
From hand to hand, and yet from hand to hand,
Until the unborn snatch it, crying out
In pity on their fathers' being so dull,
And that's success too.'

Dramatic poetry has been pretty generally held to be the highest form of the art, and probably with good reason; but it may be questioned whether the conventional modes of drama be a necessary condition to the award of the high title of 'dramatic poet.' Browning seems to me to be essentially, almost exclusively, a dramatic poet as regards manner of work—not so much on the strength of his nine plays as by virtue of his works in monologue, which display, altogether, more originality of thought and treatment. To maintain a complete and absolute

impersonality in matter, and yet to develop and preserve a strong and unmistakable individuality in manner—to depict a wide variety of character without palpable bias, and yet to leave the moral bearings of the product not only uninvolved but strongly self-evident—these are the two correlative aims with which every great dramatic poet who cherishes the idea of benefiting his race must labour, whether he has formulated those aims thus in his mind or merely holds them there dispersed as intellectual light and emotional warmth—whether he has inscribed canons for his guidance on the walls of his study or merely works on, as is probably most often the case, with head and heart right by virtue of innate superiority, and able to dispense with canons and formulas. With Browning these correlative aims seem never for a moment to have failed of their strong due influence; and in the long series of his labours we discern a complete attainment of the twofold object, although, quitting the conventional forms of drama, he has chosen to follow a course which may have been in the mind of the great poetess when she penned her splendid fervent lines on dramatic art—looking forward to the time when dramatists should ‘take for a worthier stage the soul itself.’

While designating Browning as an essentially and exclusively dramatic poet, it is needful to note his entire separation from anything connected with

the modern stage. It is difficult to avoid regarding the stage drama as virtually defunct, except for sensational purposes, and as used by music; and, in this view, there is nothing remarkable in the fact that the nobly imagined drama *Strafford* was a failure when produced on the stage under Macready's auspices in 1837. Browning's dramas, though intensely dramatic in character, are so subtle in some of the actions and indications as to require at times a not inconsiderable mental effort to catch the result intended to be conveyed. Those who go to the theatre go to be amused and excited without trouble—the treat is to be one of the senses; and Browning's plays, though they abound in attractions of feeling and excited action, have those qualities in a highly refined form, and often so veiled by subtlety of thought, that they would not be likely to get appreciated unless the theatre-audience were prepared to put up with a treat of much intellectuality and no sensationalism—almost an impossibility in the present degraded state of stages and theatre-audiences. These plays are not, for all their subtlety, by any means lacking in the right qualities of the actable drama, though in this respect Browning has a living superior in Mr. R. H. Horne. The personality of Byron's dramas was, and would now be, enough to ensure their failure, notwithstanding the strength, majesty, and beauty, which parts of them show when

analysed as poems; but in Browning's there is no such personality to obstruct our view of the beauties—only a subtlety of thought which, however much it may contribute towards the impossibility of putting them on a modern stage, can only be regarded by the cultivated reader as an exceedingly precious quality. The low tone of the theatre nowadays is no fault of contemporary dramatists, and does not take an iota from the value of fineactable plays, which are generally in a form not easily surpassed for artistic qualities.

On that 'worthier stage the soul itself' which Browning has used almost exclusively for many years in the place of a stage where boards and footlights are at all events implied, the greatest feat that has as yet been performed is *The Ring and the Book*, in which dramatic art has received a distinctly epic magnificence of structure. The common idea that epic poetry is no longer possible is obviously absurd, even without practical evidence to the contrary, and has arisen from the false notion that 'heroic' is a term applicable only to wars and large material actions. Now that Walt Whitman on the other side of the Atlantic has written what has been fitly termed the 'Epic of Democracy,' and Browning on this side has furnished what may be as fitly called the 'Epic of Psychology,' the idea of the decease of the epic is more than ever a dead idea. The day has long gone

by when heroism meant pugilism, and the might of man was measured by toughness of muscle. Breadth of mind and width of heart come first now, and the largest action is not that which covers the greatest area and deploys the largest aggregate of physical powers, but that which involves most disinterestedness, philanthropy, purity of heart, power of thought—in short the maximum of intellectual and moral force. For such a display, one set of modern men and women may serve for types as well as another; and the Roman murder case of a hundred and eighty years ago, which has so strongly taken hold of Browning, was the germ of what is perhaps more essentially modern than any great poetic production these latter centuries have yielded in England.

It is impossible in a short space to do anything like critical justice to *The Ring and the Book*. The value of a work of this magnitude from a poet with the wide artistic powers, the 'intellectual equipment,' and the profound excellence of heart which we find in Browning, is not easy to estimate when we take into consideration the range of a powerful poet's influence, not only on his contemporaries, but also on those who are to people the long void vista of the onward centuries.

V.

WILLIAM W. STORY.

‘ And concluding, which is clear,
The growing drama has outgrown such toys
Of simulated stature, face, and speech,
It also peradventure may outgrow
The simulation of the painted scene,
Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight, and costume,
And take for a worthier stage the soul itself,
Its shifting fancies and celestial lights,
With all its grand orchestral silences
To keep the pauses of its rhythmic sounds.’

E. B. BROWNING.

WILLIAM W. STORY.

THOSE who have known that the hand which chiselled the 'Cleopatra' of the 1862 Exhibition, and wrote *Roba di Roma*, has also been for some years past contributing poems to sundry magazines, must have read those poems with considerable interest as they appeared from time to time; and whoever read Mr. Story's *Primitive Christian in Rome*, published in the *Fortnightly Review* for December 1866, must have been struck at once with the ability of that poem as a product of the psychological method employed by Browning. So able was that piece that it was evident that the author was no novice, though it was just as evident that he was not a poet of the *first* order. The poem lacked music, but even in that it was not glaringly deficient, and at the same time it was so well thought out, the historic situation as well as the attitude of the speaker's mind were so well rounded off to an issue, that it was impossible not to be interested to know what hoard of such wares the author was saving up. In the autumn of 1868 an assortment of these wares was put forth under the title of *Graffiti d' Italia*; and excessively inter-

esting is the book to those who care for anything more than mere jingle or 'sentiment' in poetry. Mr. Story is, as many of my readers are doubtless aware, an American; but as he has Europeanised himself and come forward among English *literati*, we may fairly look on him as our own property. A poet of the scholar grade, his career suggests some striking antitheses when looked at beside that of the scholar-poet Miss Smedley, already referred to. Miss Smedley has been long before the public in an unpoetic capacity; but no work of hers except her most mature volume of poetry has excited general interest; whereas Mr. Story, in his *Roba di Roma*, furnished a work of prose which may be regarded as standard, while his productions in sculpture are almost too well known and too highly meritorious to leave one an excuse for naming them here. But in poetry both authors are disciples—disciples not of one master, but of two masters as diametrically opposed almost as Mr. Martin Tupper and the late M. Baudelaire. One of these masters, as we have seen, is the Laureate, and the other Browning, who, though not as popular as Tennyson, has done quite as much towards revivifying English poetry. Browning has been studied closely by nearly all the poets of the younger generation, and offshoots of his genius may be found by a discerning eye in a long range of volumes; but only one other has as thoroughly assimilated his method

as Mr. Story has, or produced poems of such sterling merit as Mr. Story's, modelled on the plan followed in the bulk of Browning's most notable works. It is not only that Browning's mode of treating a situation has been skilfully and intelligently adopted by the sculptor, with attention to the distribution of a poem's parts even; but the situations selected by Mr. Story are often of the order which Browning so much affects. While Miss Smedley seeks out material for her genial and delicate verse in situations and subjects of a decidedly popular style, Mr. Story follows his great prototype into quaint and unexplored regions of the human heart and mind, and shows a special love for those subjects which address the sympathies of the artist-class and the lovers of subtle intellectuality generally, and even betrays at times an aptitude and relish for grotesque in poetry, analogous in kind, though different in degree of execution, to that found in Browning's works. Thus, while Miss Smedley, without losing sight of the fact that man is an intellectual being, addresses the emotional nature in particular, Mr. Story, even in dealing with emotional subjects, makes an appeal which, by virtue of method or matter, usually addresses in particular the intellectual side of the mind.

A further and more technical antithesis between these two poets lies in the fact that, while one has made a praiseworthy and successful attempt to pro-

duce a drama on the right model for stage purposes, the other, ignoring the stage, has largely adopted that form of dramatic writing perfected in our own time, wherein the only stage is the mind, and wherein action and discussion, time and place, are all spoken or implied by one mouth for each work, namely the dramatic monologue. *A Primitive Christian in Rome*, perhaps the best known of Mr. Story's monologues, bears traces here and there of a less practised hand than is shown in some of the other pieces. But the outlines of the form, as well as the matter embodied, are excellent: it is in the texture of the verse that one feels at times a great deficiency. The 'primitive Christian,' addressing a fellow-Christian, adduces and discusses the four most obvious kinds of objection brought by the pagan majority against the new faith. The discussion is well sustained and not immoderately lengthy, though there is not that weight in every line which a supreme poem of the same order would carry. Of four classes of objectors the first three are not hard to dispose of; and Mr. Story obtains an artistic climax by saving the hardest for the last, and forcing the Christian to fall back for support on the quickening eloquence of Paul the Apostle. Referring to the arguments of a stolid and earnest believer in the faith which had been sufficient for such men as Socrates and Plato,—' Shall I,' says the Christian,

'dare question what such minds affirm?
"Obey! Obey!" a voice within me cries
('Tis the old echo of my early faith),
And then, "Arouse!" cries out a stronger voice,
"Arouse! shake off this torpor! Sink not down
In the old creed—easy because 'tis old;
In the dead faith—so fixed, because 'tis dead."
Let us go in and speak with Paul again.
He is so strong, he braces up our faith,
And stiffens all the sinews of the mind.'

It is easy to understand this attitude of mind under the circumstances depicted in the piece—the old faith still vital about the convert, the old temples still devoted to the old use, the old incense still smoking up to the fair gods derived from classic Greece; and Mr. Story has taken care to give us, with as artistic a manipulation of word and thought as is shown in the conclusion (just quoted), a passage betraying the charm which the sweet tales of the Olympian gods still hold over the soul of an earnest but not too austere follower of the Nazarene,—one who, though his heart has been claimed for the new creed, and his intellect has renounced the errors of the old, still yearns for the sweetness it was to think

'Of Aphrodite rising from the sea,
The incarnate dream of beauty; of the staid,
Calm dignity of wisdom bodied forth
In grand Minerva; of the gracious joy,
The charm of nature, Bacchus represents;
Of Flora scattering flowers and breathing spring;
Of all those lovely shapes that lurking gleam
Through nature's sunny openings.' . . .

And he even confesses that

'At times, the one Eternal Father seems
So far away, and this fair world that teemed
With airy shapes, so void and cold and bare.'

The poem of this author's which forms the most striking pendant to this, and which indeed can scarcely be thought of apart from this, is not in the volume at all; it is entitled *A Roman Lawyer at Jerusalem—First Century*, and appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine**, at about the time when *Graffiti d' Italia* was issued. Perhaps one of the best known of Browning's poems is the Epistle of Karshish, the Arabian physician, telling his 'strange experiences' of a case of mania to a brother physician—the case being none other than that of Lazarus, whom Karshish has encountered at Bethany, and whose tale has assumed a strange interest in his mind. That poem has unquestionably suggested to Mr. Story the idea carried out in *A Roman Lawyer*, of analysing from a technical point of view the story of Judas's betrayal of Christ. The manner of the lawyer's analysis is of course distinct from the manner of the physician's scrutiny; but the situations are parallel, and the chances are that, had the letter of Karshish not been written, the epistle of Marcus the lawyer would also never have come into being. The Arab physician tells the hallucination of Lazarus as a pathological prodigy (for, of course, he regards as a hallucination the belief of Lazarus that Christ

* October 1868.

raised him from the dead); but at the same time he betrays that the doctrine of redemption, which he learns from the Jew, has taken hold on his heart and stirred the bases of his belief. The Roman lawyer, while discussing with a lawyer's acuteness the story of Judas as told by Lysias the centurion, confesses to his friend, in a passing allusion to Paul, a tendency bred of the history he has been learning,

‘to excuse his faith,
And half admit the Christus he thinks God
Is, at the least, a most mysterious man.’

It would be unfair not to note the tameness of this, compared with the enthusiastic postscript of Karshish,

‘The very God! think, Abib; Dost thou think?
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, “O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself,
Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee!”
The madman saith He said so: it is strange.’

The well-aired theory of the betrayal adopted by Mr. Story is an interesting sample of that specially modern form of humanitarianism, the desire to clear the reputation of an historical personage who has been held in abhorrence from time immemorial. The position taken up in regard to Iscariot is analogous to that adopted by Mr. Lewes in writing of Nero and Robespierre; and such a position is per-

haps more grateful in a work of art than in an historical essay. The essay on Robespierre gives one the idea of a theory enthusiastically embraced at starting, but becoming gradually less and less dear to the theorist as research went on; but in treating a theory poetically there is no likelihood, because there is no need, of verifying as one writes. The incidents of a poem, and especially of a poem dramatic in principle, are set down not as facts, but as what are to be regarded as facts from the point of view adopted in the poem; so that, in treating a theory according to which Judas Iscariot was a most worthy individual, Mr. Story has not laid himself open to be attacked as one who would 'whitewash' the proverbial traitor, but has simply shown, in the potent manner of psychological art, that the conduct of the personage in question admits of a charitable explanation. The Roman lawyer betrays an inclination to believe the account given him by Lysias, who figures in the poem as an old friend of Judas, and according to whose view the Christ was betrayed by one who blundered in attempting to do a great thing. Lysias believes, in fact, that Judas, warmly devoted to his master, and fervently convinced of his godhead, conceived the idea that if he gave Christ into the hands of his enemies, a manifestation of the master's godhead must perforce take place, to the inevitable conviction of all witnesses; but that, seeing

no such manifestation, and finding Christ a prisoner and undone, he learned how fearful a mistake he had made, and 'turned, and went and hanged himself.' This position is ably sustained in matter of argument, and there is a good deal of fine writing in the poem.

But Mr. Story has what we may fairly call a *popular* side to his mind even as a poet. The poem we have quoted would be considered at least severe in subject and style; and one who had met with nothing by the same author beyond this work might conclude that *Graffiti d' Italia* was suited alone to those who care for what is known as *dry* poetry. This is not at all the case: throughout the volume are scattered poems of a far more genial stamp, and of many kinds. That entitled *Cleopatra* scarcely comes near to the work in marble on the same subject; but it is full of fire and passion, and works up to an almost furious conclusion that must take even the most apathetic reader by storm. The Egyptian, lying and longing for Antony, dreams of a time, 'æons of thought away,' when she and her lover, in accordance with the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, were two tigers; and after a vivid picture of feline love-making and other pursuits, she cries out:

' That was a life to live for!
Not this weak human life,
With its frivolous bloodless passions,
Its poor and petty strife!

Come to my arms, my hero,
 The shadows of twilight grow,
 And the tiger's ancient fierceness
 In my veins begins to flow.
 Come not cringing to sue me!
 Take me with triumph and power,
 As a warrior storms a fortress!
 I will not shrink or cower.
 Come, as you came in the desert,
 Ere we were women and men,
 When the tiger passions were in us,
 And love as you loved me then!

Taken as from a modern lady's lips, this sort of writing might not commend itself highly to a refined sense; but regarded as a study in antique psychology it is admirable.

The largest piece in the book—the piece too which is placed first—is entitled *Ginevra da Siena*. It is a very elaborate monologue, and the author has not displayed in it that reticence of descriptiveness and of violent action that a contemplative mind finds abundantly to praise in Browning's large monologues—which are devoted with far greater unity of purpose to the exposition of mental phenomena, both intellectual and emotional. Some of his earlier productions of this class—some few pieces which he calls *dramatic romances* and *dramatic lyrics*—betray far more of this love of physical activity, as, for instance, *The Flight of the Duchess* and *Waring, How they Brought the Good News*, and the *Cavalier Tunes*. And we might infer from analogy that this *Ginevra da Siena* is a younger piece of Mr. Story's than

many in the book. The Countess Ginevra, who is shut up in a lonely villa by a jealous husband, recounts her whole sad story to a female friend. She tells how she was married, how her husband was cold and distant from first to last, how the birth of their child failed to warm his heart, how he brought a kinsman to the house for her to entertain, and daily left them together, and how they two became mutually enamoured. Then follows the account of her lover's proposal to fly together, her difficult but decided rejection, suspicion on the part of her husband, the murder of her lover by her husband in single combat, and finally the incarceration of herself—guilty of a foreign love, though 'innocent of the great transgression.' All this is given with considerable detail, and interspersed with much description of accessories; and although the whole is done well, and with no dearth of beautiful thoughts, it is difficult not to feel that the evident intention to concentrate the reader's mind on the one set of phenomena—the painful development and decadence of Ginevra's emotional life—is in a measure foiled by a too copious introduction of detail and circumstance. Still the poem is a good poem; what is more to the point, it is very interesting; and the method of verse, though not productive of the exquisite effects in rhythmic and verbal mosaic affected by extreme moderns, is far from antiquated.

The quality of verse is much the same in the

'Primitive Christian' and other poems written in blank iambics; but the quality of thought is very much higher and deeper in that as in many others. Not imitative of Browning in matters of detail, Mr. Story has yet, in the best of his poems, clearly assimilated the method of this most original and powerful of contemporary poets, and, I should say, he has consciously and studiously assimilated it—a thing which is the more to his credit, looking at the difficulty of working in that method as compared with many others. Perhaps the best of the pieces in this method is *In the Antechamber of Monsignore del Fiocco*—which is altogether excellent. It is short, brilliant, pithy, and thoroughly well compacted—far more so than the last mentioned, which, though necessarily discursive, might perhaps be thought open to the charge of superfluous diffuseness. 'In the Antechamber,' a more than half-unwilling servant of 'Monsignore del Fiocco' summarises his mingled feelings of disgust and scorn at the psychological spectacle afforded by his master, who has been so successful in the church that he is about to become a cardinal; and the contrast between the half-frank discutant and the unctuous but immoral dignitary discussed is so boldly and artistically rendered, that the piece almost recalls the brilliant *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*, or the more than brilliant *Bishop Orders his Tomb*. After running rapidly through

various charges against the corrupt ecclesiast—charges more thrown in by artistic *innuendo* than by direct expression—this healthy-minded servant, healthy-minded because submitting to a corrupt but inevitable rule under strong mental protest, ends thus :

‘ And this reminds me—did you ever know
Nina, that tall, majestic, fierce-eyed girl,
With blue-black hair, which, when she loosed it, shook
Its crimped darkness almost to the floor?—
She that was friend to Monsignor while yet
He was a humble Abbé—born indeed
In the same town and came to live in Rome?
Not know her? She, I mean, who disappeared
Some ten years back, and God knows how or why?
Well, Nina,—are you sure there’s no one near?—
Nina—

Per Dio! how his stinging bell
Startled my blood, as if the Monsignor
Cried out, “ You, Giacomo; what, there again
At your old trick of talking? Hold your tongue !”
And so I will, per Bacco, so I will;—
Who tells no secrets breaks no confidence.
Nature, as Monsignor has often said,
Gave us two eyes, two ears, and but one tongue,
As if to say, “ Tell half you see and hear;”
And I’m an ass to let my tongue run on,
After such lessons. There he rings again !
Vengo—per Dio—Vengo subito.’

There is great variety of subject in the book, and no monotony of metrical execution ; but the bulk of the poems are in the one method ; and though many of them are of such superior quality that they must draw attention wherever met, the chief point to be insisted on is the author’s great success in the use of this very difficult and essentially modern method.



VI.

AUGUSTA WEBSTER.

‘ You saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem.’

R. BROWNING.

AUGUSTA WEBSTER.

Mrs. WEBSTER's two best-known volumes make up a very respectable show of work done consistently and consciously in the method of Browning; and that method is followed with completer consistency and seeming consciousness in the last collection of *Portraits* than in the former collection of *Dramatic Studies*. This is a disciple-poet of whose productions it cannot be said that they hold much evidence of the absolute necessity for poetic utterance, unfailingly betrayed by the master-poets of this time and other times; and yet the age need not care to spare such work as Mrs. Webster has done; for it is not only valuable as a compact proof how firmly the analytic method is taking root, but is also supported by a good knowledge of modern life and thought, a good classical erudition, much sterling thought if no strikingly new ideas, and the faculty of neat work at will.

Those who want the rapt utterance of a Mrs. Browning, or the chiselled perfection and lovely sentiment and tender music of a Miss Rossetti, must not seek it here. Of the occasional lyrics of Mrs. Web-

ster—whether of those published under the pseudonym ‘Cecil Home,’ or of those that go to make up a large proportion of the ‘other poems’ printed with *A Woman Sold*—there is scarcely one that is even striking, and certainly not one that forces itself on the heart and mind as a lyric must do if it be one indeed; but throughout the volumes there is that degree of competency to handle the language, and mould it into respectable verse, that is indispensable to the verse-producer, whether he is to be greatly original or a creditable disciple. The salient quality of Mrs. Webster’s work, however, is a keen power of analysis and self-elimination, such as fits her peculiarly for graduation in that school wherein her name has been here included; and her works in the fashion of that school are really noteworthy.

Her few hundred pages of neat mediocre lyric work, perhaps making up a preponderant bulk if her labours be divided into classifiable and unclassifiable, did not earn for her any wide repute, and never would have earned for her a name to be preserved more than a few seasons, even if poems of the complete excellence of the ballad called *The River** existed in considerable numbers (as they do not) among worse works. The thoughts in this unclassifiable division of work are generally good as far as they go; but they are never great or very deep: the workmanship

* In *A Woman Sold*, &c.

is always passably good, but it is never original. In point of execution, these minor poems derive from Tennyson and Mrs. Browning, and in a lesser degree from Browning and Miss Rossetti; and a derivative style wherein so many prototypes are traceable will never give any piquancy of tone to poetry of any order. It is only when the larger lines of a preëxisting method are seized wholly and intelligently by a scholar-poet that a derived method can be made to embody memorable results; and this is why a position such as Mrs. Webster would never have attained by her miscellaneous verses will in all likelihood be long assigned to her on account of her many good monologues, fashioned after the shaping of Browning. In most of these there is far less minute mannerism than in the others: what there is is traceable chiefly to Mrs. Browning, and just a little to the Laureate;—while there are a few small disagreeable matters of style not to be traced to these poets—such as the repeated use of the adverb ‘almost’ as an adjective—

‘an almost child’—

and the same misuse of other adverbs, as in

‘to think

On the *once* themes is to be my *once* self’

and

‘Joy at this house’s *now* despair.’

Such things as these are too dreadful to be criticised.

In the two foregoing sections of this essay, mono-

logue poetry has been spoken of so fully that no further space must be devoted to abstract discussion of it; and we may at once look at Mrs. Webster's contributions to it.

In the earlier volume of *Dramatic Studies*, published in 1866, the two most striking poems are, curiously enough, those in which there is a certain defect of realism less suitable to this solid modern form of verse than to some elder, more ethereal forms. The two poems are *The Snow Waste* and *With the Dead*. The unreality of the former consists mainly in its being in part allegorical, while that of the latter rests on what the modern mind rejects as unscientific and absurd—the purgatorial prolongation of a human life after the fashion of ‘the Wandering Jew.’ In fact, in *The Snow Waste*, the mysterious exigencies of the subject have forced the author into using an element quite foreign to monologue or dramatic poetry, namely snatches of narrative on the writer's own part; and had it not been designated a ‘Dramatic Study,’ one would scarcely have regarded it as dramatic at all; but inasmuch as the vital thread of the poem is a realistic tale of love and hate, told by the man who has given himself up to those passions, we may accept the work for what it has been called, and admire the vivid realisation of the phases of passion treated in it. It is not, however, a pleasurable poem: the frightful opening picture of ‘one

sitting 'mid a waste of snow,' with nothing living but himself, companioned by 'two forms that seemed of flesh, but blue with the first clutchings of their deaths,' has only power to recommend it; and the tale he tells, how he bore his wife's brother a fierce hate of jealousy, is a powerful rendering of that arrogant egotism of a mean soul, who cannot bear the idea that any one but himself is dear to her he thinks he loves. How the tenant of the 'waste of snow' loses his wife by the plague, and how he tricks his brother-in-law into going in to embrace the corpse, and then locks him in with it to catch the plague, and how the murderer comes back to gloat over the last writhings of his victim, are things too revolting to leave one any pleasure in looking at the corresponding phases of passion and thought, handled with no small strength in this poem. And it must be confessed that other pieces of Mrs. Webster's bear marks of disfigurement by what I cannot but call a coarse power—a lack of fineness in the conception and treatment.

The subject of *With the Dead* is really handled greatly, and there is no coarseness about it. The piece is carried out with a thoroughly dramatic realism; and the situation can be construed as a possible one, though the speaker has to tell of certain supernatural things. The foundation of the poem is the following little bit of dialogue in the Catacombs, from Hawthorne's *Transformation*:

"Has any one ever been lost here?" asked Kenyon of the guide.

"Surely, signor: one, no longer ago than my father's time," said the guide; and he added with the air of a man who believed what he was telling, "but the first that went astray here was a pagan of old Rome, who hid himself in order to spy out and betray the blessed saints, who then dwelt and worshipped in these dismal places. You have heard the story, signor? A miracle was wrought upon the accursed one; and, ever since (for fifteen centuries at least), he has been groping in the darkness, seeking his way out of the catacomb."

Again in this poem the connecting thread is a jealous hatred; but the treatment of the passion is finely contrasted with its treatment in *The Snow Waste*. The pagan, in love with a Christian maiden, and having lost her through her preference for Glaucon, a fellow-Christian, feigns half-conversion, and betrays the Christians in the hope of saving her and getting Glaucon out of the way. The time at which he tells his tale here is most likely meant to be one of certain hours of rest vouchsafed to him yearly—that is to say, any time during the fifteen centuries named by the guide; but the realism of the manner is saved from being spoiled if we recall the possibility that what the speaker is saying may merely be his own mad conception of what has taken place immediately after his betrayal of the Christians; and to have seen his Lucilla made what Browning calls 'panther's meat' might well have sent the wretched fellow mad. How the stubborn pagan attains once and again to a shallow desire towards the outside of Christianity,

and is always pushed back by his not unnatural hate for Christian Glaucon, is given strikingly ; for he has constantly before him the gnawing thought that that death he meant to part her from Glaucon through all time has in fact wedded her to him through all time ; and this thought is thrust upon him by reading over and over the legend on the grave-slab,

‘ Lucilla a sweet soul asleep in Christ.
And Glaucon loving her, more loving Christ.’

This simple legend combines the two suggestions of what the tortured, haunted man most desires, rest and sleep, and what he most loathes, community in aught with Glaucon ; and this antithesis of hate and craving for rest is sustained capitally throughout the poem.

Sister Annunciata, a less remarkable poem at first sight than either of these, is perhaps the most powerful and exhaustive piece Mrs. Webster has published. Spoken at intervals through a night of self-questioning, it reveals a history by no means uninteresting, and paints a character and situation interesting in a high degree. The soul whose portrait we get here is a fine, exalted, loving and ardent woman, compelled to take the veil for family reasons, so that her rich love for a man, being thwarted, goes ostensibly into a channel of religious fervour. What is noteworthy about the piece is the complete realisation of how a full-blooded, proud, Southern nature, cap-

able of a deep and lofty affection, can school itself to the routine of convent-life, and even deceive itself with the idea that its affections are set purely on 'things above.' Laudable skill has been displayed in showing how 'Sister Annunciata,' passionately looking back on her earthly lover, yet deems herself Christ's bride, and how a certain fervid eloquence and divers hallucinations (called visions) impress the simple sisters with the idea that this is some most holy and awful woman come among them,—while those qualities are in fact but manifestations of the finer womanliness that she has attempted to crush out of herself. The work hardly bears cutting for samples; but it is well worth careful reading.

The two most considerable poems among the *Portraits* are *A Castaway* and *The Manuscript of Saint Alexius*—the one a careful analysis of a modern woman's fall and failure to rise again above her worse self, the other a masterly delineation of that almost devilish fanaticism of some of the early Christians, who sought, at all hazards and sacrifices to other people, to save their own souls. Of the other poems in the collection, two are classical, *Medea in Athens* and *Circe*; while the remainder are close transcripts from various phases of modern life and thought, not too subtle to be easy to apprehend, not too uncommon to be of general interest, and not too commonplace to be poetic.

The conception of Circe as a woman waiting and longing for the arrival of some master-man, who shall claim her by virtue of superiority, is finely worked out; and very cleverly put is her plea that those who have become beasts under her witchcraft are but what they were by nature :

‘Too cruel? Did I choose them what they are?
Or change them from themselves by poisonous charms?
But any draught, pure water, natural wine,
Out of my cup, revealed them to themselves
And to each other. Change? There was no change;
Only disguise gone from them unawares:
And had there been one right true man of them
He would have drunk the draught as I had drunk,
And stood unchanged, and looked me in the eyes,
Abashing me before him.’

This and the other classical subject are treated with greater nicety and care of minute workmanship than is usual with Mrs. Webster; and yet they are perhaps less charming on the whole than *The Happiest Girl in the World*, the soliloquy of a simple sweet girl who is just betrothed, and is finding faults with her happy self—too fully satisfied with her joy to be quite sure that she is as much disturbed in heart as a loving maiden should be. Delicate shades of feeling like this require a tender and delicate hand to treat them pleasantly; and looking at the want of fineness in some of Mrs. Webster’s work, it is almost a surprise to find so sweet and wholesome a sentiment so sweetly set forth as that in the passage beginning with—

' Oh vain and idle poor girl's heart of mine,
 Content with that coquettish mean content !
 He, with his man's straight purpose, thinking "wife,"
 And I but that 'twas pleasant to be fair. . . . '

The many various moods of self-deception, both innocent and guilty, have afforded Mrs. Webster a fruitful ground to work upon ; and this particular poem of a girl who loves perfectly, yet blames herself for imperfect loving, reaches a climax in one beautiful little utterance that we cannot but accept thankfully, even if doubting how much it may be natural. I mean the following elaborate and perfect metaphor :

' I am the feathery wind-wafted seed
 That flickered idly half a merry morn,
 Now thrall'd into the rich life-giving earth
 To root and bud and waken into leaf
 And make it such poor sweetness as I may ;
 The prisoned seed that never more shall float
 The frolic playfellow of summer winds
 And mimic the free changeful butterfly ;
 The prisoned seed that prisoned finds its life
 And feels its pulses stir, and grows ; and grows.
 Oh love, who gathered me into yourself,
 Oh love, I am at rest in you, and live.'

One is almost tempted to smile at the dear inconsequent girl who can find such rhetoric to express her entire devotion, and yet cannot quite forgive herself the small measure of her love as compared with her lover's love. But as the default of realism here is merely in the amplitude of the rhetoric, and not in the state of contradictory feeling depicted, it is not the critic's part to find fault ; for what would any poem be but mere prose unless its rhetoric were

ampler than the phraseology natural to the situation chosen?

There are yet two works by this author not to be passed over in silence. I do not refer to the wearisome, long, loose, formless piece of verse called *Fairies' Chatter*, or the carefully written pseudo-idyllic tale *Lota*: of these two, published with *A Woman Sold*, the one is mere desultory rhyming, the other a rather disagreeable little story in tolerable enough blank verse. I do not even mean *A Woman Sold*, a fairly complete analysis in two dialogues, or *Anno Domini 33*, a poem wherein the monologue of Judas Iscariot seems to me to stand out in vulgar shallowness from among work that is neither very good nor very bad. The two remaining productions that really claim attention are the translations Mrs. Webster has made of *Prometheus Bound* and *Medea*. If to these two excellent translations be applied the high test of inquiry whether, as the works here stand, they are poems of supreme beauty, it will have to be confessed that they fail under such test. But as literal rendering has been the translator's first aim, we need not be so exacting; and the two poems are certainly quite enjoyable as poems. The *Medea* is really a valuable contribution in the absence of any rendering by a great poet; but the nearest approach to a high quality of verse is not lyric in a great way.

The present version of the *Prometheus*, equally

with all other new versions, must of course be compared with Mrs. Browning's magnificent rendering of that magnificent work; and Mrs. Webster's falls no less short of Mrs. Browning's than do all other English presentations of the mighty conception of Æschylus. Mrs. Webster's literalness is doubtless useful, but literalness of word is a matter of small account as compared with essential faithfulness and large beauty; and it does not seem necessary to give more than one extract from each of the versions to show how futile has been the attempt to supersede Mrs. Browning's, —if indeed such was the aim of the more recent version; and it is not easy to know what is the aim of re-translating a foreign work unless it be to supersede former translations. I cannot find for comparison a fitter passage than the last words of the chained Titan: Mrs. Webster gives them thus,—

‘Lo, in very deed, no more in mere talk
 Does the earth now rock,
 And a cavernous boom of thunders rolls near,
 And the forked fierce blaze of the lightning glares out,
 And whirlwinds chase round the eddying dust,
 And the blasts of all the winds leap abroad
 At war each with each in contending gusts,
 And the sky and the sea are mingled in storm—
 Such tempest from Zeus in our sight strides on
 Towards me as though to daunt me with fear.
 Oh mother mine, thou revered one, Oh sky
 That bear'st in due round light common to all,
 Do ye see me what wrong I endure?’

Mrs. Browning gives the same passage thus,—

‘Ay! in act now, in word now no more,
Earth is rocking in space.
And the thunders crash up with a roar upon roar,
And the eddying lightnings flash fire in my face,
And the whirlwinds are whirling the dust round and round,
And the blasts of the winds universal leap free
And blow each upon each with a passion of sound,
And æther goes mingling in storm with the sea.
Such a curse on my head, in a manifest dread,
From the hand of your Zeus has been hurtled along.
O my mother's fair glory! O Æther, enringing
All eyes with the sweet common light of thy bringing!
Dost see how I suffer this wrong?’

There seems to me to be no less a gulf here than that fixed for ever between the mediocre and the supreme. But Mrs. Webster's *Prometheus* is certainly more of a poem than any other English one except Mrs. Browning's.

The relative merits of poets do not form altogether an agreeable subject; but there is a sufficient ground for a few words here on the position of Mrs. Webster when compared with such of her countrywomen as have followed the art of poetry seriously. I have more than once seen claimed for her the first place among the women-poets of England; and this claim seems to me to be so absurd a heresy, that I feel bound to record a contrary opinion. To my mind we have in the poetic literature of this century no less than four female names of greater weight than hers. To enter on a serious defence of Mrs. Browning's fame against such a competition would, I think, be about as imbecile as to vindicate for

Shakespeare a place above that occupied by Mr. George Boker; and another woman-poet whom we lost prematurely by death, Emily Bronte, had, I think, a far larger share of genuine poetic faculty than Mrs. Webster has yet shown. Among the living, it is surely only a little less absurd to suppose any one really rates Miss Rossetti below Mrs. Webster than to think Mrs. Browning could be seriously held to take a lower rank; and, although it is easy to understand how the unusual strength of mind and analytic acuteness displayed by Mrs. Webster might give rise to an idea that she is a poet far superior to one so delicately sweet as Miss Smedley, I cannot but deem the last-named lady, rather than the former, entitled to rank next to Miss Rossetti among living English poetesses. It is not difficult to discern beneath the anxious finish and retentiveness of Miss Smedley's work a greater native force of mind than that which Mrs. Webster has deployed, as it would seem to its full extent; and that Miss Smedley's verse has more of external charm than Mrs. Webster's is scarcely less evident than that Mrs. Webster's has more surface-evidence of strength than Miss Smedley's.

VII.

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

'Then the fair woman, that was his soul, spoke again to him, saying: . . . "Chiaro, servant of God, take now thine Art unto thee, and paint me thus, as I am, to know me: weak, as I am, and in the weeds of this time; only with eyes which seek out labour, and with a faith, not learned, yet jealous of prayer. Do this; so shall thy soul stand before thee always, and perplex thee no more." And Chiaro did as she bade him.'—D. G. ROSSETTI.

"These fair Spring blooms," we said, "shall surely form
Fair fruit when Summer's through; and men shall see
A vintage mellowed than the vines, and be
Made glad with a fruit-wonder rich and warm
From summer sun-rays!"—What, then, was the swarm
Of gnawing insects that kept bare the tree
These many barren autumns,—so that we
Have prayed no rain for it, and feared no storm?

Nay, but what matter when the fruit is found
This autumn? Wherefore search the why and how
Of these blank years of waiting, when this year
Is bowed with its proud burden?—Each fruit here,
Of these late fruits, is red and ripe and round,
"Like the sweet apple upon the topmost bough!"

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

IF any one had undertaken a year or two ago the task of writing on Mr. Dante Rossetti as a poet, he must have been at some little pains to show why that title was claimed at all, and how it was that a poet of high order was living among us, known only to a few friends, and perchance some scattered friends of friends. His is a name that has been barely more than a tradition even to persons exceptionally interested in what concerns the fine arts: men have known that the name represented a power in at least two of the arts; but except for a chance look at a picture in a private collection, or a furtive perusal of a poem in a defunct magazine (or perhaps even in manuscript), there have been no good means open to the curious generally whereby to judge of the nature and quality of the power in either art. To those, however, who are intimately acquainted with the Preraphaelite movement from its commencement, he has always assumed the position of 'father' of the movement, both in painting and literature, notwithstanding the comparative vagueness of idea conveyed by his name

to a public in whose ears the names of Holman Hunt, Millais, Ford Madox Brown, and others, are sounds of no small significance. Whenever Mr. Dante Rossetti has come before the public, he has been at least remarkable; and the task of appraising anything one could lay hold of, produced by him, has been a more than ordinarily pleasant one for such critics as feel the irksomeness of the commonplaces to which so much contemporary criticism is necessarily devoted.

To a public not allowed a fair opportunity of judging for itself concerning his pictorial ability, it must be not a little annoying to have his mysteriously enshrined talents as a painter frequently cast in its teeth,—more especially when it is considered that, from what we do know, the vague encomiums passed about would seem to have good foundation. Yet, beyond the limits of a small circle, he is to all intents and purposes palpably connected with the art supposed to be his *forte* by no other means than a few book-illustrations, wherein the designs are inadequately rendered by faulty English woodcutters. Still, however rendered, these designs show the priceless attainments of delicate fancifulness and original creation. There is not in one of them any trace of commonplace or conventionality.

For judging of Mr. Dante Rossetti as a poet, the public really had, if they chose to avail themselves of it, tangible and to a certain extent substantial ma-

terials; but even here artist and critic have been under a disadvantage; for the productions of his which were at the same time mature as to period of publication and substantial as to quantity were only translations, though of the highest conceivable order of rhythmic translations. The greater number of his original poems accessible before the middle of 1870 were published as long ago as 1850, quite in the infancy of the Preraphaelite movement; and his book of translations from the Italian, *The Early Italian Poets*, came out in 1861. Some of these translations showed in the matter of execution a long advance on the early pieces; and when it was announced on the fly-leaf of the book that a volume of verse by the translator was preparing for publication under the title of *Dante at Verona and other Poems*, there really seemed to be good reason for expecting something more than ordinarily meritorious. Intimate as Mr. Rossetti had been with the subject of Dante, whose *Vita Nuova*, with a group of minor poems, is among the pieces translated in *The Early Italian Poets*, it was rational enough to suppose that the subject of the great exile at Verona would be at all events feelingly dealt with; and that was one important element of success. Another lay in the evident facility of versification and imaginativeness of thought elsewhere displayed by the author. But here again the public curiosity was doomed to remain un-

slaked, for nine years! During that period *The Early Italian Poets* was the only poetical production of Mr. Rossetti that could be readily obtained: that excellent book remained 'in print' in its first edition until quite recently, though now out of print; but the fugitive pieces of an original nature were not to be had without some little seeking, being scattered through a few numbers of defunct magazines, generally forgotten, though treasured by a few and eagerly sought by a few more. Most of these poems are very short—many of them sonnets; but none, however short, are without the great essential of poetry—a beautiful form well freighted with thought or feeling. The four most considerable of them are *My Sister's Sleep*, *The Blessed Damozel*, *The Burden of Nineveh*, and *The Staff and Scrip*.* The two first named are penetrated alike with an exquisite sense of the pathetic, and both are executed entirely in the same method; but while *The Blessed Damozel* is essentially medieval in its general tone and many of its ideas, *My Sister's Sleep* is on a subject less remote and more widely appreciable. In *The Blessed Damozel*, one tells of his lady in heaven, and of her thoughts, sayings, and doings while waiting his arrival from

* *The Blessed Damozel* was first published in *The Germ* (1850), and afterwards in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (1856), with considerable modifications. *My Sister's Sleep* was published in *The Germ*, and *The Burden of Nineveh* and *The Staff and Scrip* in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*.

the land of the living ; and although the subject is one of much apparent difficulty, the poet has managed it so exquisitely that any cultivated person must at once see that the result is a poem in every sense of the word. But *My Sister's Sleep* is a simple death-bed scene on Christmas-eve, and its pathos is of an order that must come home to all who have felt or imagined what it is to yield a loved one to the inexorable summons of death—and who has not felt or imagined this ?

In both of these poems Mr. Dante Rossetti shows—and indeed elsewhere the same remark applies to his work—a strong sense of outward form, coupled with great imagination : it is the same sense that one notes in the poetry of Mr. Morris, displayed in dwelling upon the salient externals of the subject, whether highly imaginative or not. A poet who had not this faculty in some degree could not of course produce anything but vague shadows of creation ; but Mr. Rossetti possesses it in a remarkable degree. *The Blessed Damozel* is a very highly imaginative subject—as far removed indeed from ‘realism’ in the vulgar sense as possible ; and yet, in imagining it, the poet never seems to have lost sight for a moment of the colour and detail of his thought. The following are the first two stanzas of the poem :

‘ The blessed Damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven ;

Her eyes knew more of rest and shade
Than waters stilled at even;
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven.

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
No wrought flowers did adorn,
But a white rose of Mary's gift,
For service meetly worn;
And her hair lying down her back
Was yellow like ripe corn.'

Without any appearance of straining for a local colour foreign to the natural sense of the artist, this is a picture as vivid and tender as the pure delicate angel-pieces of Angelico; and although it has a stronger implication of flesh and blood than ever showed itself through the tempera of the monk, it is yet strangely suggestive of him. There is something calm and pure in the thought, and a pre-renaissance simplicity, which go almost inevitably with the name of the great Frate. But conventual the poem is *not* in the slightest degree; and in a subsequent verse we get flesh and blood plainly enough among the attributes of the 'blessed damozel,' as conceived of by the earthly lover, but still the purity which comes of exquisite calmness:

'And still she bowed above the vast
Waste sea of worlds that swarm;
Until her bosom must have made
The bar she leaned on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm.'

Here is the element we do not get from Fra Angelico,

though his contemporary Lippo Lippi did not fail in it. We might gaze for ever on Angelico's pictures, whether of virgins or angels, and calmness and purity we should never miss; but one would never suspect the bosom of one of his sexless angels of warming anything: 'we come to brother Lippo for all that—*iste perfecit opus*;' and Mr. Rossetti, with lilies and vestments and aureoles held in an almost palpable atmosphere of medieval faith, has yet the courage to *make* his picture by the super-addition of what the daring innovator of the cloisters filled his heavenly and earthly beings with, regardless of the outcries of monk and prior. Having, then, with the high daring of a true artist, conveyed the element of real flesh and blood into the region of a medieval heaven, Mr. Rossetti has prepared us to hear the blessed damozel say her say, and the poem flows without a shade of violence into words that would be as sweet and intelligible to the ears of an ordinary lover as the speech of a maiden still on earth—words with love and aspiration in them, but without any passion that is not exalted: her ultimate aspiration is simple and lovely:

'Only to live as once on earth
At peace—only to be
As then awhile, forever now
Together, I and he.'

This conception of personal love not abated by the rare atmosphere of a higher life, but purified, strength-

ened, and made perfect, is beyond praise. This is better, more solidly satisfying, yields a pleasure less mingled because more pure, than any ravening tirade about 'stinging lips' and 'eyes insatiable' and beauty that 'bites like a beast,' however faultlessly such tirade be woven into verse. One stanza of this passion-pure damozel's white thought and tender sentiment outvalues twenty volumes of mosaics pieced together from the stale though rosily dyed relics of the love that 'has no abiding, but dies before the kiss.'

My Sister's Sleep opens with the simple and direct sentence 'She fell asleep on Christmas-eve;' and the poet then sketches-in the scenery of his subject vividly and firmly, but all with the same direct simplicity. The sad interior has but three figures in it—the narrator, 'my sister,' and 'our mother, who had leaned over the bed from chime to chime.' After the interior and its inmates have been placed before us, conspicuous in the solemn dimness of mingled light from candle, fire, and moon, the narrator says,

'I had been sitting up some nights,
And my tir'd mind felt weak and blank;
Like a sharp strengthening wine, it drank
The stillness and the broken lights.

.

Twelve struck. That sound, which all the years
Hear in each hour, crept off; and then
The ruffled silence spread again,
Like water that a pebble stirs.'

The whole dead-still action of the poem is given in touches of deep, half-silent sound such as this; and the whole pitch has an extraordinary muffled breathlessness, partly managed by the fit selection of incidents of sound, and partly by the slow short step of the measure. The mother rises at the birth of the Christmas-day to utter the words, 'Glory unto the newly-born;' and here we are told that 'her needles, as she laid them down, met lightly, and her silken gown settled.' Meantime the sister, supposed to be asleep, is actually lying dead, and the knowledge of this is developed by another incident of muffled sound:

'Just then in the room over us
There was a pushing back of chairs,
As some who had sat unawares
So late, now heard the hour, and rose.'

This drives the anxious mother to the bedside, fearful lest the sounds should 'have broken her long-watched-for rest;' and then she learns that her cares avail no longer. The concluding lines are—

'Our mother bowed herself and wept.
And both my arms fell, and I said:
"God knows I knew that she was dead."
And there, all white, my sister slept.

Then kneeling, upon Christmas morn
A little after twelve o'clock,
We said, ere the first quarter struck,
"Christ's blessing on the newly born!"

Worked into the quaint rigid ballad-fabric of *The*

Staff and Scrip, which borders about as closely on the abrupt as *My Sister's Sleep* does, there is the same subtle admixture of modern delicacy with medieval fire and intensity that one notes in *The Blessed Damsel*. This ballad is scarcely as fine as either of those two poems; and yet it is full of splendid poetic qualities, and fervour is blended with simplicity in it to a degree that is no less than startling.

The Burden of Nineveh is a poem of a different order altogether, and as a piece of high meditation it is among the finest of Mr. Rossetti's works, although when first published its stately train of thought was just perceptibly marred by some lines of a sarcastic vein, and of a semi-comic tone. The artistic monotony of the rhythm combines with the close continuity of the thought to give the poem an elevation above all that is sensuous or material; and there is yet a richness of colouring in the fabric, together with a ring of musical utterance sufficient to redeem it from any approach to dryness. The keen retrospective flashes awakened in the poet's mind by the sight of a Nineveh bull-god, brought into the British Museum, take on a reality of colour and life only surpassed by their philosophic acumen: the solemn glance into the future is fitly separated from the solemn retrospect by a pause in which the poet's individual life lifts its voice above the life of thought to assert the social pleasures of the day's programme—

'That day all hope with glad applause
Through miles of London beckon'd me'—

and it is a noble conceit that is set forth in the verse,

'Yet while I walk'd, my sense half shut,
Still saw the crowds of kerb and rut
Go past as marshall'd to the strut
Of ranks in gypsum quaintly cut:
It seem'd in one same pageantry
They follow'd forms which had been erst;
To pass, till on my sight should burst
That future of the best or worst
When some may question which was first,
Of London or of Nineveh.'

It is difficult to imagine a poetic faculty more keenly acquisitive than that which is able to grasp, in the mere analogy suggested by the sequence of gypsum bas-reliefs and real human crowds, the great panoramic idea of human races all tending in one direction—of creeds and codes and beliefs all passing on to the inarticulate state of things that have been and that remain only half recorded for successive ages to study and speculate upon. Even the Christian faith, all-powerful as it has been, but takes its place in the poet's panorama, and he imagines how when

'Man's age is hoary among men,
His centuries three score and ten,—
His furthest childhood shall seem then
More clear than later times may be,'

and he shall perhaps deduce from the bull-god found in the ruins of London that we English of the nineteenth century were not Christians, but worshipped

this god. His natural smile at such an idea passes as his deeper thought subtly restores the analogy between the external characteristics of the bull-god, and the gross mammon-worship of average humanity, seen in modern London no less and no more than in other highly-wrought civilisations :

‘The smile rose first,—anon drew nigh
 The thought: Those heavy wings spread high
 So sure of flight, which do not fly;
 That set gaze never on the sky;
 Those scripted flanks it cannot see;
 Its crown, a brow-contracting load;
 Its planted feet which trust the sod:
 (So grew the image as I trod)
 O Nineveh, was this thy God,
 Thine also, mighty Nineveh?’

It is quite impossible to convey by the meagre process of extraction the beauty of these poems, such is the compact unity of tone, such the delicacy of foreshadowing and sequence of the whole. No one of them as originally printed is entirely free from faults; but these are of a slight and remediable kind—such as an occasional roughness of rhythm, and one or two imperfect rhymes; and they have disappeared entirely in the versions of the poems given in the author’s collected works: doubtless the blemishes would similarly have disappeared in a reprint as late as 1861, for there is nothing of this sort of any importance in the volume of translations of that date.

In that volume we get an admirable sense of execution. Mr. Rossetti laid down in his introduction

what he considered should be the aim of a translator of poetry of one language into poetry of another: he says that the 'life-blood' of rhymed translation is 'that a good poem shall not be turned into a bad one;' that 'the only true motive for putting poetry into a fresh language must be to endow a fresh nation, as far as possible, with one more possession of beauty;' that 'poetry not being an exact science, literalness of rendering is altogether secondary to this chief aim;' that 'when literalness can be combined with what is thus the primary condition of success, the translator is fortunate, and must strive his utmost to unite them;' and that 'when such object can only be obtained by paraphrase, that is his only path.' And these principles he carried out so well, that the book has an air of original poetry rather than of translation as usually conceived. There are of course many sentiments and thoughts such as would at once betray that the poems are of another land and time than ours; but this merely results from the success of another of the translator's good aims—that of giving as complete a view as possible of early Italian poetry. To have carried out these views in the transference of just a few lyrics from a foreign language to ours would have required but little sustained power added to poetic feeling; but to do the same with a compactly arranged series of poems of various classes, including the *Vita Nuova* of Dante, was a task in-

volving much real artistic and, in a measure, creative labour. If, in striving to keep a translation faithful to the original, the translator trammels himself with *verbal* fidelity, any aroma possessed by the original must of necessity fly off, so fugitive is the external quality of poetry. So that, even if the translator reëndows the poem with a poetic form, maintaining his verbal fidelity, the result is not a poem. But if he first assimilate thoroughly the sense and form of the original, and then, without regard to words, evolve through his proper artistic faculty a poem in the same sense and the same form, but with a poetic character minutely (*i. e.* verbally and phraseologically) intelligible to those whom he intends it for, then the result is obviously a poem as well as a faithful translation. Now in these translations we constantly meet passages which, setting aside the thought or sentiment conveyed, are beautiful, musical, aromatic (whatever you like to call it), of their own nature—by virtue, that is, of the combination of their sounds. Such a line as

‘ Now thou hast risen like the risen sea’

is not above average for poetic thought, but it is perfect in construction and sound, taken without regard to its meaning. The same sense could have been conveyed prosaically, and doubtless would have been so conveyed by a *literal* translator. This is felt even more strongly in many passages of the *Vita Nuova*.

Some of the sonnets of this work, as here rendered, are as fine as sonnets can be, as for example that opening with the line,

‘I felt a spirit of love begin to stir.’

As far as the Italian liquid fluency and musical rhyming qualities can be represented in our less fluent, less pliable, and less musical tongue, they are represented by this beautiful sonnet and many others, as also by numerous *Canzoni*, *Ballate*, &c., found in the collection.

The three sonnets which Mr. Swinburne transcribed for his Royal Academy pamphlet in 1868 are more perfect specimens of poetic utterance than even these translations. Their thorough maturity and executive strength seem to indicate that the practice of poetry must have been closely followed since Mr. Rossetti put forth *The Blessed Damozel*, notwithstanding the time he is known to have devoted to painting. In the sonnet headed *Sibylla Palmifera* we have the lines,

‘This is that Lady Beauty, in whose praise
Thy voice and hand shake still,—long known to thee
By flying hair and fluttering hem,—’

and in that headed *Venus Verticordia* there is one line almost unsurpassable for music and condensed meaning,—such a line as gives the highest proof of poetic faculty of a lofty order: it is the fifth line of the sestet,

‘A little space her glance is still and coy;
But if she give the fruit that works her spell,

Those eyes shall flame as for her Phrygian boy;
 Then shall her bird's strained throat the woe foretell,
 And her far seas moan as a single shell,
 And through her dark grove strike the light of Troy.'

The last line has been modified by the poet: it now stands—

'And her grove glow with love-lit fires of Troy;'

but the earlier text has been followed in this and in all other cases up to the present point, on the obvious ground that thus far the subject has been Mr. Rossetti *without his book of Poems*. In the last sonnet mentioned I prefer the old text, as a matter of taste; and I may say the same of Mr. Swinburne's version of the *Lilith* sonnet:

'Of Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told
 (The witch he loved before the gift of Eve)
 That, ere the Snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,
 And her enchanted hair was the first gold.
 And still she sits, young while the earth is old,
 And, subtly of herself contemplative,
 Draws men to watch the bright net she can weave,
 Till heart and body and life are in its hold.
 Rose, foxglove, poppy, are her flowers: for where
 Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
 And soft-shed fingers and soft sleep shall snare?
 Lo! as that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went
 Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent,
 And round his heart one strangling golden hair.'

In substituting at a later time 'the rose and poppy' for 'rose, foxglove, poppy,' and 'soft-shed kisses' for 'soft-shed fingers,' the poet doubtless followed a delicate as well as an artistic bent; but it is questionable whether the changes do not rob the sonnet of some

pictorial beauty on the one hand, and on the other of some of its masculine force in embodying a type of sensuous beauty as distinct from spiritual beauty.

Such was the hidden poet, concerning whose works in verse one scarcely ever met a word in print, until, simultaneously with a rumour that he was about to issue a volume, the sixteen marvellous sonnets *Of Life, Love, and Death* appeared in *The Fortnightly Review*, and were allowed to pass almost unheeded by the critical 'faculty'! But now, at length, the long-withheld poems are, or may be, in all men's hands; and not slow have been the printed tongues of all men who have to do with criticism in recognising nobility which it is but small merit to recognise, and bestowing praise too obviously just to fall necessarily back on the bestowers. Indeed so promptly did the general press acknowledge the significance of this book's advent, that scarcely a word is left for any remaining voice to utter, the praises of the very cover, with its quaintly beautiful 'end-papers,' being wellnigh sung through.

At a time when most of the poetry written so thoroughly in earnest as to carry the reader above recognition of flaws has many flaws to recognise at will, and when much that is finished nearest to perfection has for basework thoughts either worthless or blameworthy and lamentable, it is a great treat to come upon a volume bearing a weight of earnestness

in every page and a burden of bestowed care in every line; and such a book must every reader of intelligence find Mr. Rossetti's to be, even in a first skimming perusal. From title-page to imprint no trivial thing is to be found, and from first to last word of each poem, be it never so small or modest, no syllable can be detected standing in its present position without the deliberate sanction of the author's thoughtful consideration visibly stamped upon it: indeed it is questionable whether a comma even or pause skulks unratified by the loving approval of an artist too wholly an artist in soul to give the world anything hasty or half considered, too wholly a craftsman in words to bestow deliberate care without securing worthy results. We have long ago degraded the good word 'laboured' by applying it merely to results where painful purblind casting and recasting are but too evident; but if such word could nowadays be applied to that luminous far-reaching soul-inspired revision that all the most perfect poems of the present epoch have more or less obviously undergone, then one would fain call Mr. Rossetti's book a laboured book. So far, however, as that word implies want of ease and reality, or any other crime against the comely body and lucid spirit of Art, it is next to impossible to attach it to more than one or two small pieces in the book; and even these would be more accurately described as showing a slight con-

sciousness of rhetoric than as being really laboured in that sense.

Besides reprints of all the poems already glanced at, we have now the long-missing *Dante at Verona*, and a great deal that is even more important; nor is it too much to say that the whole collection is of that rare order that commands immediate admiration in the occult way wherein an admirable person commands it: one knows at once that it is beautiful poetry, just as one knows at once and recognises the benign presence of a beautiful-souled person—not by any special trait of benignity or beauty, but by the complete absence of any saliency of feature such as might draw the attention at first sight away from the *ensemble*. But as the intuitive love for a love-worthy person grows by near knowledge from vague to explicit, and as the heart, having got thoroughly to itself feature by feature the nobleness of a man or woman, communicates the same to the intelligence in such wise that they can be clearly dealt with and set forth with reason,—so, from close holding to real poetry, the vague sense of shed *beauty* gives slow way before defined and pinnacled *beauties*; insomuch that the mind is able to confirm by examples the intuitive verdict of the heart, and to adduce in shapely sequence, if need be, somewhat of the logic of admiration. This is what we have all experienced in our acquaintance with the supreme lyre-sweepings of the

incomparable Shelley, filled full with fervid meaning not to be taken in at first by any but the nearest of kin to that great spirit;—this is what some of us have experienced in the rugged materialism and mystic sublimity of him who, across the Atlantic, still inflates his grand throat in chanting the psalms of democracy and manly love; and so, in a measure, may this be said of Mr. Rossetti's work. His is not the bird-rhapsody, that no human heart ever poured forth as the heart of Shelley did; nor the giant work of hurling rocks up Olympus or filching the divine fire for the warming and lighting of men—work to which Walt Whitman's are the latest Titan-loins girded; but, being filled with meaning and veiled only with ardent beauty, his poetry has the instant mastery that passes the pathway to the heart and builds its memorial structures thence into the intelligence; and, best of all, the structures most solidly built thus are always the best worth building, nothing unworthy the hands of an artist being here dealt with, and no matter of opinion or feeling or belief being so set forth that any dissentient can feel the sting of offence.

With the mythology used by the Italian poets of Dante's time much of the spirit of those poets has passed into Mr. Rossetti's pages, doubtless through the near communion he had with them when at work on his beautiful volume of translations; but as this

spirit is transfigured by means of the accumulated results of six hundred years of human life, and as this mythology is always redeemed from staleness or stiffness by the subtle intensity of the thoughts and feelings portrayed through its aid, we cannot find either the one or the other obsolete, and must recognise their effects on this book as giving a very desirable variety to work in a tongue so alien as ours from the tongue of those men. Much of the volume might be characterised as thoroughly Italian; and for no poems so much as the sonnets of *The House of Life** have we to thank the Italian stock, in that a graft has been grafted on our great poetry-tree, and has come to fruit that the tree of its own force could never have put forth. Other fruit we have and have ever had in abundance :

‘ The tree’s bent head
Sees in the stream its own fecundity ;’

but this fruit we have never yet had ; and now that we have it, we may well

‘ Eat it from the branch and praise the tree’—

praise the tree that yielded the graft and the tree that took it and nourished it, and more than all on this head the grafted branch itself. For in these sonnets deep themes of life and love, of death and ultimate hope, are set to a music utterly new to our

* A most important division of the book—fifty sonnets and eleven songs ‘ towards a work to be called *The House of Life*.’

English ears, and have been thought out in a channel differing widely from the channels usually cut by our poets for such themes: the love-sonnets have a burning reality hardly ever attained as here without any shade of licentiousness; behind the highest rhapsody-point of love may be discerned always the shadow of earnest life; and something of the sad shadow of anticipated death is felt through the very strength and depth of the life-shadow. No recklessness of love-utterance is here to mar the greatness of the work, and no flaw of work to mar the greatness of the theme: the heart is right, and the head is right, and the hand is right; and the fifty sonnets are an unexampled perfection: to them, considered as sonnets and a poem of sonnets, all others in our language must give place—not even excepting our two other greatest works in sonnets,—Shakespeare's, namely, and Mrs. Browning's forty-four disguised under the title *From the Portuguese*.

The grounds of the supremacy claimed for these sonnets need to be indicated. The sonnet is, of all forms of verse thoroughly well known and adopted in England, the most highly-civilised and artificial. Leaving aside the question of its absolute value for modern uses, it is evident that, when so artificial a form is selected, it must be used with great straitness of observance if its integrity is to be at all preserved, and with intense delicacy and *savoir faire* if it is to

be preserved in ease and liberality, and with great weight of significance if the technical beauties are to be held together by sufficient justification of labour given. Thus the steadiness of hand and clearness of mind required for rounding into the invariable limit of fourteen iambic lines some weighty matter of thought or delicate subtlety of feeling is not easy to overrate. To say that Shakespeare fell short of the needful strength of hand or clearness of head were mere absurdity. He conformed perfectly to his own ideal; but the fourteen-line stanza in which he wrote was *not* a sonnet in the strictest sense. The strict sonnet is two quatrains, followed by two triplets or a sestet; and Shakespeare chose to write his series in the form of three quatrains and a couplet. Moreover, in the sonnet quatrain the two outer lines rhyme and the two inner lines rhyme, the second quatrain having the same outer rhymes as the first, and indeed, in the strictest form, the same inner ones too, as in the *Lilith* sonnet (p. 202). In Shakespeare's sonnets, on the other hand, the quatrains, which are usually independent as to rhymes, are of the alternate order, thus:

‘Being your slave, what should I do but tend
Upon the hours and times of your desire?
I have no precious time at all to spend,
Nor services to do, till you require.’

This very grave alteration of the form seems to set

Shakespeare's sonnets beyond the contest for supremacy; and Mrs. Browning's, though always strict as to form and weighty as to matter—always lyric in their beauty and musical in their sound—have not quite the requisite delicacy and consistency of finish for supremacy in a case where finish is so essential an item for the comparative valuer.

The sonnet form presents great attractions to mere dabblers in verse; and it is no doubt on this ground that compositions of this class are not more popular in England, where alone sonnets as noble as those of Italy are to be found. We have a great number of these 'poemets,' bearing no traces whatever of the triviality of occasional verses. Mrs. Browning's are distinctly a connected poem; and those of *The House of Life*, many of them more or less connected even now, are just as distinctly portions of a far greater poem, great as that is; for, while the woman-poet treated the course of a single woman's love, the man-poet's work is not circumscribed in subject at all, as the title implies. The songs and sonnets of the very *Vita Nuova* are less thoughtful than these, less free from traces of mechanical influences, and, one might almost say, less delicately musical and less grand in the weightier cadences of those portions which are fullest of thought. If the *Vita Nuova* is easier to apprehend than some parts of *The House of Life*, it is not that this is the

clearer and that the more obscure, but that the one sprang of the absorbing sacrificial passion of an enthusiastic young idealist, while the other has grown, as the ultimate work of Dante grew, under the fruitful influences of varied life on a mature man's whole being. A realism as nobly terrible as that stamped all over the pages of the grim and splendid *Commedia* appears in many of the songs and sonnets under discussion, and, indeed, in much of the more melancholy poetry of the collection—a realism not to be confounded with puerile literalism, but the utter reverse of that. I would note especially the manner in which things past are presented in all the mystic terror of their relentless continued existence, as in the four sonnets headed *Willow-wood*, wherein the speaker tells how, through the cadenced dropping of his tears, and through the half-recognised song sung by Love, he became

‘aware of a dumb throng
That stood aloof, one form by every tree,
All mournful forms, for each was I or she,
The shades of those our days that had no tongue.’

Nothing can be more vivid and clear-cut than the apparition of these tongueless days walking in ‘Willow-wood’ ‘with hollow faces burning white;’ nor can those sonnets be at all surpassed for mellow-beauty of sound that takes a colour in the mind and abides there as a perfect thing. But a more isolated sonnet must serve for example of the poet's great power in

realising mental phenomena, and throwing them into finished figure-pieces wherein thought takes substance and substance manifests itself in sound and colour—not 'where music and moonlight and feeling are one,' but where music and language and colour and feeling are so blended as to seem one. As a sample of this vein of work, there is no more noble sonnet than *Lost Days*, wherein each wasted day of a man's life is seen rising to accuse him of self-murder :

'The lost days of my life until to-day,
 What were they, could I see them on the street
 Lie as they fell? Would they be ears of wheat
 Sown once for food but trodden into clay?
 Or golden coins squandered and still to pay?
 Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet?
 Or such spilt water as in dreams must cheat
 The throats of men in Hell, who thirst alway?

I do not see them here; but after death
 God knows I know the faces I shall see,
 Each one a murdered self, with low last breath.
 "I am thyself,—what hast thou done to me?"
 "And I—and I—thyself," (lo! each one saith,)
 "And thou thyself to all eternity!"

This fervent little poem is priceless not only for its positive qualities, but also for its absolute incompatibility with any meanness or littleness of work. It holds distinct assurances, better than any bond, that he who wrote it would publish nothing base or even trivial; for such a realisation of responsibility for the days entrusted to a man will not couple with any abuse of the hours and minutes of such days by doing

mean work in them. An artist whose ideas are thus cut as it were with a red-hot blade on his very heart cannot always pick and choose his subject; he must often *be chosen by* his subject; but whatever that be, we may feel sure of large affluent handling and true human tendencies and just and masculine views of life.

He who enters this 'house of life' at its first sonnet need fear no change of essential matters when he arrives at the fiftieth, but may pass to the remaining chambers to find there the same lofty qualities, and to go out at the doorway of the last song with larger ideas of life and a keener sense of beauty, if he give but good heed to what he meets. The two songs *Penumbra* and *The Woodspurge* might, for sagacity of observation, have passed for work by the sagacious one of all contemporary poets; while the execution is Mr. Rossetti's own and unmistakable. *The Song of the Bower* has a *pre-Swinburnian* richness of colour and sharp beauty of verbal counterpoint suggestive of parental influence on certain compositions in all ways less reticent than this, and published sooner, whatever be the respective dates of production; and in the concluding song, *The Sea Limits*, we get a compend of much philosophy in few words:

'Consider the sea's listless chime:
Time's self it is, made audible,—
The murmur of the earth's own shell.
Secret continuance sublime

Is the sea's end: our sight may pass
 No furlong further. Since time was,
 This sound hath told the lapse of time.

No quiet, which is death's,—it hath
 The mournfulness of ancient life,
 Enduring always at dull strife.
 As the world's heart of rest and wrath,
 Its painful pulse is in the sands.
 Last utterly, the whole sky stands,
 Gray and not known, along its path.

Listen alone beside the sea,
 Listen alone among the woods;
 Those voices of twin solitudes
 Shall have one sound alike to thee:
 Hark where the murmurs of thronged men
 Surge and sink back and surge again,—
 Still the one voice of wave and tree.

Gather a shell from the strown beach
 And listen at its lips: they sigh
 The same desire and mystery,
 The echo of the whole sea's speech.
 And all mankind is thus at heart
 Not anything but what thou art:
 And Earth, Sea, Man, are all in each.'

In passing even thus far, enough has been extracted to exhibit certain qualities of Mr. Rossetti's poetry that have reference to texture, and whereto I would call special attention. There is scarcely a line quoted above that will not bear witness to a remarkable individuality in the method of forming lines. It is not entirely new, even to those who have never before seen anything of Mr. Rossetti's; for traces of the method are to be found in the pages of the poet's sister, and also, in a greater or less measure, in

early poems by Mr. Morris and Mr. Swinburne. All three of these younger artists have worked out styles of their own distinct enough from the original model; while with Mr. Rossetti himself the particular element in question has apparently gone on gathering distinctness. I refer to a certain crispness of cadence, which is masculine without being in the least degree harsh, and which seems to be got by so placing each word that it is impossible to ignore the full weight and value, not only of small and modest words, but also of every syllable. The manifest fall of the rhythm brings out the little words into constant distinctness; and the obvious separation of words and syllables goes to make the fall of rhythm manifest; but in which direction the manipulation is felt in the artist's mind it is hard to judge—probably there is an equivalent action and reaction. The important point in this matter of *technique* is that, regarding the poems merely as models of style, their effect will be to combat the slovenly tendency of contemporary writers and speakers to slur and blur their words; and at the same time those poems show how much true and dignified richness of line may be got without falling into one of the salient foibles of latter-day poets—the abuse of elision. Mr. Rossetti's blank-verse even has no default of richness or variety, and is yet more pure of blots and free from tricks than that of any living artist except the Laureate.

This point naturally leads the mind to the great monologue called *A Last Confession*—the only poem of the collection that is in blank-verse.

This is in the last degree excellent among works of the same order: as a study in morbid psychology, pointing everywhere to issues the utter reverse of morbid, it is subtle and wide and full of wisdom; and as a deeply analytic poem it has this remarkable quality—that the artist has succeeded in maintaining throughout the complex theme a perspicuity as complete as if the matter were one of mere children's prattle. He who makes the confession is a man of a simple nature enough—a man of pure patriotism and true single-hearted love; but her whom he loves he has slain in a mad moment of doubt; and his country's cause has brought him to a premature bed of fierce pain and coming death; so that he is presented to us with his simple nature warped terribly and worked across with many seams and scars. How these things have come about, and by what dark and thorny ways he has been brought to this plight, he tells his ghostly confessor in snatches of reminiscence, always leading up to the dreadful climax of his secret, and always, at a point of high suspense, falling back again without accomplishing the actual confession of the crime. Picture after exquisite picture is placed before us, and still the deed remains for a space untold; and even at the very last, so

strongly kept up is the repugnance to go over the scene again in thought or speech, that the man rushes through the account of the deed even as the deed itself had been rushed through, and never actually owns that he *did kill* the woman—only says how he came to know he *had stabbed* her; thus:

‘Have I not told you yet,
Not told you all this time what happened, Father,
When I had offered her the little knife,
And bade her keep it for my sake that loved her,
And she had laughed? Have I not told you yet?
“Take it,” I said to her the second time,
“Take it and keep it.” And then came a fire
That burnt my hand; and then the fire was blood,
And sea and sky were blood and fire, and all
The day was one red blindness; till it seemed
Within the whirling brain’s entanglement
That she or I or all things bled to death.
And then I found her lying at my feet
And knew that I had stabbed her, and saw still
The look she gave me when she took the knife
Deep in her heart, even as I bade her then,
And fell, and her stiff bodice scooped the sand
Into her bosom.’

It will be noticed that the immediate instrument of the girl’s and man’s undoing is a laugh; and in the working out of the poem it is good to note the firm fine thread of laughter-incidents whereon the poet has strung the tale of this dying man, into whose very soul a girl’s heartless laugh has entered as iron, and whose brain is given up to the echoes of a phantom-laughter that affrights him, even at the moment of death, from the brink of that stream of

ghostly counsel and comfort he would fain drink of
and wash in to the healing and cleansing of his soul.
The first laughter mentioned is close to the opening :
the man comes right up to the point at once ; but
breaks off with—

‘ Father, you hear my speech and not her laugh ;
But God heard that. Will God remember all ? ’

and then plunges back into a far remembrance of the
childish laughter of the girl when he found her, an
infant deserted by her parents in time of famine :
here he ends with subtle simplicity—

‘ With that, God took my mother’s voice and spoke,
And sights and sounds came back and things long since,
And all my childhood found me on the hills ;
And so I took her with me. ’

His next retreat from the point of the scornful
laugh is made to tell of the widely different heavenly
laughter of female saints seen in a bright sweet
dream of heaven : thence he passes into a tale of how
her laughter was turned to tears once by the break-
ing of an image of Love he had bought her, the
gilded dart of which gift drew ominous first blood
from her childish hand ; and the next laugh he tells of
is a light maidenly one at the thought of becoming a
woman. Then he relates how he chid her at a later
point for untimely laughter, and how she sang him
a song of peace-making—a song given in Italian and
English, and in either language the very music of

tears and laughter—a thing midway in this poem of mixed reminiscence, and after which there is un-mixed misery in every incident. Another laugh that stays with the man on his dying bed is one that came from her when he questioned her as to a transfer of devotion from an Italian Madonna to one ‘tinselled and gew-gawed, a slight German toy,’ and when she replies lightly,

‘She had my old thoughts,—this one has my new.’

A later-told more hideous laughter is that heard in a nightmare, when she stands before him and wrings out her hair, bloody from the wound in her side, and mocks the screams he utters; but the laugh of doom is one less ghostly: in approaching this point of his confession for the last time, he tells how he stopped to buy the dagger, and heard the ‘coarse empty laugh’ of a ‘brown-shouldered harlot’ at a tavern-window—a laugh which comes fearfully back to him when, three hours later, his gift is scornfully rejected; for he recognises or fancies a similarity between his beloved’s laugh and the harlot’s, and takes the likeness as a summary of ‘all she might have changed to, or might change to.’

Such is the mechanism of this imagined confession, if ‘mechanism’ that can be called which has no faintest taint of the mechanical. So natural and unrestrained and perfect is the whole scene, that one

does not at first notice how this laughter is made prominent at each step in the difficult ladder by which the man climbs to drop his heavy burden of secret guilt; and yet the whole thing shows a deepness of design as evident as it is deep, and as spontaneous as it is evident. Thoroughly elaborated as the poem is, it is easy to see that neither the incidents nor the thread were arrived at by painful reasoning, or by any other process than that real poetic intuition concerning the nature of which critics must be content to remain profoundly nescient. It is easy to see that the thread of laughter was the only right thread to lead to the high tragedy of the last paragraphs of this poem, depending altogether on the lightness of a girl; but the difficulty is to appreciate the quality of that insight which saw all this before it was written down—insight which saw in detailed clearness how the brain of the haunted man could be best turned to account by using a string of its natural reminiscences tinged with the one colour, instead of crowding the work with supposed supernaturalisms. There is a dreadful beauty in the conclusion of the scene, wherein the man *sees* the slain girl clearly before him, and gives up all hope of salvation:

‘ Father, I have done :

And from her side now she unwinds the thick
Dark hair ; all round her side it is wet through,
But like the sand at Iglio does not change.

Now you may see the dagger clearly. Father,
I have told all : tell me at once what hope
Can reach me still. For now she draws it out
Slowly, and only smiles as yet : look, Father,
She scarcely smiles : but I shall hear her laugh
Soon, when she shows the crimson blade to God.'

The iron-handed unrelenting Nemesis of a man's own misdeeds was never painted in more sanguine colours than here.

Not in this poem alone does the genius of Mr. Rossetti manifest itself in what is weird, relentless, and sad : there are four poems in his volume, beside this one, fairly to be classed together as principal poems—namely, *Eden Bower*, *Dante at Verona*, *Jenny*, and *Sister Helen* ; and there is no joy in any one of them, except the joy in what is beautiful. The first and last of these are not to be overrated for their purely artistic qualities, nor are the other two for the tender human sympathies visible throughout their texture—the one with the sorrows of a great wronged soul, the other with the unsorrowing nameless victim of a wide social ill. *Dante at Verona*, I must confess, does not strike me as having the distinct fitness of form notable in every other poem in the book : there is no default of fine workmanship in the individual stanzas ; but as a narrative analysis of the situation named in the title, the poem is hardly as compressed as it might be. Every page is full of fine thought finely cast ; but there seems to be a

slight tendency to discursiveness, an unwillingness to lose any available material; and yet, for all this, there is but a single verse one need care to dispense with—that wherein the poet has attempted to render a bitter retort of Dante's, depending for its point on a pun that will not translate into English. Mr. Rossetti need not have troubled himself about Dante's bitter pun on the name of Can Grande della Scala, when he was able, a few pages farther on, in treating of the triumph of the corrupt republic, to set down the only really grand pun I remember meeting with in the language:

‘Respublica—a public thing:
 A shameful shameless prostitute,
 Whose lust with one lord may not suit,
 So takes by turns its revelling
 A night with each, till he at morn
 Is stripped and beaten forth forlorn,
 And leaves her, cursing her. If she,
 Indeed, have not some spice-draft, hid
 In scent under a silver lid,
 To drench his open throat with—he
 Once hard asleep; and thrust him not
 At dawn beneath the boards to rot.’

This is grim enough for Dante's self, and splendid enough; and there are but few stanzas in the poem far lower in standard than these, while many have a deep unrippled stillness of sad beauty very different from this tingling brand burnt fiercely on the brow of medieval Florence.

Of Jenny it is not easy to speak worthily: it is a

poem that almost all criticism or discussion must misrepresent, not on account of any ineffable workmanship such as may be found in many of these poems, but simply because of the utter cleanliness and manliness with which the matter in hand has been treated. It is a monologue; and the case of the courtesan is taken up and analysed, not from the distant stand-point of a parliamentary or scientific debate—not from the half-instructed vantage-ground, or rather disadvantage-ground, of a woman's-rights' council—but from the near position which only one who has seen the inside of Jenny's own room could assume. The fact that this poem has been accepted for what it is, a noble work of art, and that no voice has been lifted against the situation taken for treatment, shows pretty conclusively that the outcry raised against some poetry of our day has not been the result of mere squeamishness on the part of the public, but the natural and proper stigma of ignoble work. English readers and critics have shown that they are alive to the beautiful adaptabilities of subjects once tabooed, provided the treatment be worthy of the matter, and the matter, however sad, worthy of the treatment. In this poem of *Jenny* these things are clearly so; and, as in most works of high art, the structure and adornments are not weakened or disfigured by any *direct* moral or didactic intention: there is a fine dramatic feeling, a complete human-

ness, and a lofty conviction that ground another might find unholy is holy ground to him who treats it as such. He who must have a moral for the poem can find one at every page—to wit, that no wrong-doer or set of wrong-doers can ever be influenced for good by such treatment as is usually given to lepers and such-like. There is something exceedingly lovable about the speaker in this monologue, who, having fallen in with Jenny from a simple desire to dance, takes her, tired-out, to her lodging, and lets her sink down and rest her head on his knees, and so sits till in the grayness of dawn ‘the woman almost fades from view,’ and he sees in beautiful lost Jenny

‘A cipher of man’s changeless sum
Of lust, past, present, and to come.’

It is perhaps a question rather for artists than for critics, how far the monologue form may be allowed to include *thoughts* that are unspoken; and, as far as I know, *Jenny* is the only poem of any importance in that form wherein such a question is raised. One would have said, that a monologue must clearly be formed entirely of such utterances as *might* be spoken; and Mr. Rossetti’s antecedents, as leader and founder of the Preraphaelite movement of 1848, would have led one to suppose that his views would not include such an impossibility as a monologue partly spoken and partly thought: yet such a monologue is *Jenny*. That it is not a poem of thoughts is

shown by the actual lapse of time and change of position being indicated on the regular monologue principle: the whole action is implied by the speaker as taking place at the various moments of speech; and yet at page 116 we read,

'Let the thoughts pass, an empty cloud!
Suppose I were to think aloud,—
What if to her all this were said?'—

clearly implying that what goes immediately before was unspoken thought only, and could not have been actually uttered by him who is entrusted with the whole matter as spokesman. It seems to me that the liberty thus taken with the form in question is exceptionable on simple technical grounds—involving as it does an impossible transfer of the imagination from a man's words to his inscrutable thoughts.

In the other two principal poems referred to above—both of them ballads with burdens—the incantation of *Sister Helen* seems fitter matter for ballad-work than the legend of 'Adam's first wife Lilith,' treated in *Eden Bower*. I know of no such intensity in any ballads as exists in these two in equal measure; nor does any other composition of the class, so far as I am aware, arrive at the same dazzling height of finish, or the same superlative manipulation of the burden, as is attained in *Sister Helen*. The slaying of an inconstant betrayer, which this woman accomplishes by melting a waxen image of him before a

flame, is set forth with equal perfection, whether we regard the cultured imagination displayed in the details, or the loftiness of the thoughts flashing from every turn, or the awful suspense in which the whole attention is held from stanza to stanza, as the poet relentlessly urges the reader through the dread sense of something going on with heaven above and hell beneath, and that something profoundly coloured by mixed impulses heavenly and infernal—

‘Love turned to hate, between hell and heaven!’

This gulf of antithesis is further maintained by the entire matter being carried through in dialogue between the girl and her little brother; so that while the whole spectacle burns the eyes with the sight of a woman at the preternatural fever-heat of hate for a man once loved—hate even unto death—every verse yet holds its own antidote and balm in the naïve innocence of the child's untainted humanness. Regularly as each incident is lifted into sight in the hands of this unwitting infant, so does it receive its baptism of flame at the hands of the too much witting sister; and each time does the poet chime in with some weighty suggestion or broad idea. No one verse is less thoughtful than the weightiest, and none less comely than the fairest; not one line can be detached or dispensed with, and not one word rings a tone higher or lower than the tone of flawless things rung

•

on the counter of the whole soul's judgment. This is probably the poem wherein Mr. Rossetti has placed himself most unmistakably beyond the reach of detraction—this the work of all these admirable works whereon I would prefer to base any claim left to make for him—this the achievement I would call to witness of the quality and scope of a poet, of whom it may perhaps be said that he has done nothing bulky ; for the brain-force expended in such an achievement is less easy to gauge than that expended in much production of anything less intense, less firm of grasp, less living and actual in pulsations of red blood. I can only refer my readers to the volume for confirmation of my views on *Sister Helen* ; for this poem, more than most of its fellows even, is absolute in its indivisibility.

Throughout Mr. Rossetti's poems may be found an ever new variety of subject, and an ever constant presence of the author's fresh individuality of workmanship—new thoughts always crowding the pages in forms of unfamiliar beauty. The transfusion of Italian blood into a newly-opened vein of English verse is not the least among the notable accomplishments of this poet ; nor is it in any way the greatest, —for the poems that are at once longest and loftiest assert no nationality. To run a firm new fibre into the web of the English tongue, worked over and over as it is with splendour of great poetry, is at all times

no small matter—nor any small matter to find a place for a new tint on a fabric dyed through and through as that is with colour of infinitely varying richness and delicacy. Yet thus much Mr. Rossetti has done; and he has done it not for an hour or a day or a season, but for the present and future of those who speak his tongue. Many of us have long waited and wished earnestly for some substantial public proof of what could be done by this poet, who has been so many years scarcely more than a poet by repute, and that repute but a narrow one; but the recent harvest pays for the waiting—pays for it too so richly that, when we look at it in its fair entirety, we are tempted to apply to it the lines of simile which the poet has himself snatched warm from the urgent heart of Sappho,—

‘Like the sweet apple which reddens upon the topmost bough,
 A-top on the topmost twig,—which the pluckers forgot, some-
 how,—
 Forgot it not, nay, but got it not, for none could get it till now.’^o

• *One Girl, a Combination from Sappho.* P. 186.

VIII.

CHRISTINA GABRIELA ROSSETTI.

'A song-bird beautiful-souled.'

A. C. SWINBURNE.

CHRISTINA GABRIELA ROSSETTI.

It has long been the custom in England to seize upon all products of female genius, and canvass them with a severity certainly no less rude than that with which the works of men are handled: we find women excluded as far as possible from open competition in many fields of artistic labour, for which they are clearly not unfitted, and not only excluded by moral embargoes, but actually debarred by force from privileges accorded to men. It is not difficult to understand why this is, for in some things, 'however we brave it out, we men are a little breed;' and in this particular there can be no doubt that there is more behind our unwillingness to admit women to the esthetic franchise than the mere fear lest our wives and daughters should lose delicacy or refinement, become less wifely and daughterly, through coming before the public: as artists women do not come personally before the public as a matter of course, and in many cases the profession of this consideration must be a mere subterfuge. In certain walks of literature we are no longer able to hold our own against the encroachments of the 'weaker sex:' in prose fiction they have

asserted their ability so clearly and practically that there is no longer any attempt to gainsay it; and usually a novel is now treated simply as a novel, though a critic sometimes allows himself to sneer at the female authorship of a weak work, and this in face of the fact that the very best novels of the present day—those most richly endowed with just the characteristics which have been considered beyond the reach of womanhood, and at the same time nothing wanting in feminine tenderness—are the work of a woman, though issued under a male autograph. The case is somewhat similar in France: without comparing ‘George Sand’ with ‘George Eliot,’ it may fairly be said that, in the matter of style and invention, it would be hard to find an abler French novelist than Madame Dudevant. George Eliot, though unapproached, is by no means an unfollowed leader, or a phenomenon without a pedigree and relations; and in this particular branch of literature it only needs time and space to show that women are no whit behind men in ability.

This being the case as regards prose fiction, is there really any reason why other walks of art, usually considered higher, should not be traversed by women as ably as by men? The question is a vexed one, but at the same time it remains undecided. Logical reasons could be adduced, no doubt, why it is not only improbable, but impossible, that women

should obtain supremacy in epic poetry, in the drama, in sculpture, in musical composition; and this, perhaps, on the ground that women's minds are so differently fashioned from men's, that they could not possibly be brought to the severe tasks in analysis and synthesis, and the protracted stress and strain, which extended works in these kinds demand. The same reasons are applicable here as in cases of political, civil, or military employment: it has been brilliantly asked, 'What should we do with a leader of Opposition in the seventh month of her pregnancy? or a general-in-chief who at the opening of a campaign was doing as well as could be expected? or a chief-justice with twins?'—and the answer is patent enough; but at the same time maternity does not follow womanhood as a matter of course; and the true grounds upon which men as a body would exclude women as a body from these employments are, I suspect, deeply seated in the *heart*. It would be a severe wound to a man's feelings to see his wife and daughters thus employed; it would seem to go against nature entirely. Yet this is the logic that is employed in the argument, and doubtless it is logic; but fortunately logic is not everything: if it were, we should have womanhood suffrage at the present moment, and should be reduced to the necessity of entreating our women not to use it. No, logic is not everything; for this same logic

would have served to place beyond the bounds of possibility such a phenomenon as the production not only of *Adam Bede*, *Romola*, &c., but of whole rows of good novels by women, which nevertheless exist. Now as yet we have but one epic poem* by a woman, and not many dramas of feminine extraction that are worth naming; but that is no reason we never should have more; and in the mean time we can actually show several poets who have produced under the bewildering influence of petticoats admirable poems of many sorts—and have asserted practically the delicious *mot* of their greatest spokeswoman, ‘This vile woman’s way of trailing garments shall not trip me up.’

As little tripped up by feminine dress as any lady who ever trimmed a verse is Miss Christina Rossetti; and although she has not produced any one work of great dimensions, or even of great scope in small dimensions, her two little volumes yet constitute not only a very choice contribution to real poetry, but also a significant fact in the history of female literature. Miss Rossetti shows before all things that a woman of esthetic genius is not necessarily a wayward *fabricante* of whatever matter comes to her hand for artistic manipulation, but that a woman may train

* *Aurora Leigh* seems to me to be a poem of epic rank, and more strictly an epic than any work of the present day. This may seem laughable to some of my brother critics; but the present is not the fit place to indulge the desire to defend my position in regard to that grand poem.

herself to a special manner of workmanship, and become amenable to the influences of a movement just as advantageously as a man may. The first thing that strikes us on going through this lady's works is that she is a poet: this impression is the earliest, because we *feel* it; and the second thing which comes forward prominently—second, because we find it out by *thinking*, not *feeling*—is that she is a Preraphaelite poet, profoundly influenced by the Preraphaelite movement in literature, and perfectly conscious of certain principles in workmanship. To say that she has attained a uniform perfection in this matter of workmanship would be rash; but it may be fearlessly said that her works exhibit, in a greater degree than those of any other woman-poet of her country, the sense of execution, the sense that the words in which a thought first suggests itself are not of necessity the fittest words in which to put that thought before the world,—and this notwithstanding the Preraphaelite aim of approximating the 'actualities' of language more nearly than is usual with poets.

There are reasons for not subscribing to the claim more than once put forward in Miss Rossetti's behalf to take rank beside the great Mrs. Browning. The calibre of mind required for the production of such works as *Casa Guidi Windows*, *Mother and Poet*, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, &c. (not to name *Aurora Leigh*, the sacred dramas, and the incomparable se-

cond translation of the *Prometheus*), is bigger than the calibre of mind demanded for the creation of such poems as *Goblin Market*, *The Prince's Progress*, and many of the smaller and more perfectly gem-like poems of Miss Rossetti. Nor can I see that the powers of expression exhibited by Mrs. Browning were less superior to those shown as yet by Miss Rossetti than her exhibited powers of idealisation were:—simply, Miss Rossetti has betrayed a keener sense of the necessity of execution than Mrs. Browning did; not a greater executive ability, not even as great an executive ability, for the intuitive manipulation of Mrs. Browning is, in numerous cases, not short of perfection; as, for instance, in many passages of *Casa Guidi Windows*, in the forty-fourth *Sonnet from the Portuguese* (and several others), in *A Denial*, in *The Measure* and *The Sleep*, and in numerous other instances. Mrs. Browning was a poet to the very depth of her nature; and no one ever had a higher or holier sense of the responsibilities of a poet. Nevertheless she has not shown, with all her impassioned bursts and sweet outpourings, which attain perfection by force of passion or sweetness, the sense that careful and dextrous manipulation is a requisite of poetic art; and Miss Christina Rossetti, without this sweeping force of passion, with a more limited emotional range, and with a narrower area of subject, has unquestionably shown this sense.

Therefore to her be all honour for being the first to prove what, in this behalf, may be achieved by an apt and fitting education.

It has never yet been accorded to women to receive the same education as men in many respects; and notably deficient has been the place assigned to artistic influence in the education, not only of women relatively, but of men and women absolutely. Had Mrs. Browning had the exceptional bringing up which Miss Rossetti *must* have had, there is no saying to what untold heights she might have soared; but although Mrs. Browning was always more or less a prodigy, and passed a *studious* childhood and youth, we are not told, and I for one should not believe it if I were, that her early years were passed under the influence of other working artists. Now we cannot but be assured that Miss Rossetti's were: her father was a poet, and her brother is a poet: the family as we know them display, and always have displayed, a remarkable degree of cohesiveness; and Miss Rossetti, under the name of 'Ellen Alleyne,' was associated actively with the 'Preraphaelite brotherhood,' in its original organ *The Germ*. And here, in this admirable sense of workmanship, is the result. It is hardly needful to remark that any amount of education in the world would not have made Miss Rossetti a fine poet unless she had been one by natural proclivities; and that she possessed at an early age

a true fund of poetic imagination as well as a most cunning ear for melody is proved by the existence of one of her loveliest poems in the pages of *The Germ*. For quiet perfect delight and full satisfaction of the sense of beauty in sound, I know of no more complete talisman than the four verses called *Dream Land*—which is Miss Rossetti's earliest known poem: the significant vagueness of the situation and the calm sweet step of the measure are alike inimitable; and it is but rarely that one can be called on to say a verse is more perfect than are these two for instance:

'She left the rosy morn,
She left the fields of corn,
For twilight cold and lorn
And water-springs.
Through sleep, as through a veil,
She sees the sky look pale,
And hears the nightingale
That sadly sings.

Rest, rest, a perfect rest,
Shed over brow and breast;
Her face is toward the west,
The purple land.
She cannot see the grain
Ripening on hill and plain;
She cannot feel the rain
Upon her hand.'

After the lapse of fifteen years the fastidious executive judgment of the author found no more important change to make in this poem than the substitution of

'Rest, rest at the heart's core'

for

'Rest, rest that shall endure'

a change apparently made because 'core' was deemed a better rhyme than 'endure' for the terminals 'more' and 'shore.' To me this seems over fastidious; because, as usually pronounced ('endyore'), the cancelled word is a perfectly correct rhyme. But this poem with its alteration was not selected as a special example of the executive faculty, for there are a great many more valuable as illustrating the remarks made on that head. Take rather, as an instance, the little song called *A Birthday*, in the volume styled *Goblin Market and other Poems*: it is only two verses, and those are not freighted with any weighty thought or strained to the pitch of resonance by any volubility or fire-blast of passion; but the whole sixteen lines are full of healthy happiness and the ringing melody of a joyful young heart:

' My heart is like a singing bird,
 Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
 My heart is like an appletree,
 Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
 My heart is like a rainbow shell,
 That paddles in a halcyon sea;
 My heart is gladder than all these
 Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;
 Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
 Carve it in doves, and pomegranates,
 And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
 Work it in gold and silver grapes,
 In leaves, and silver fleurs-de-lys;
 Because the birthday of my life
 Is come, my love is come to me.'

There is no posing for effect whatever, no straining

of materials to meet a prescribed end; but it is not possible, nevertheless, to fail of seeing that the selection of subjects for comparison is most choice: melody, richness, movement are in the heart of the singer; and the bird, the fruit-laden branch, the nautilus, must do service for imagery. This is the very essence of maiden delicacy: the exuberance of joy breaks forth in no unmeasured and uncomely burst, but is poured simply, fluently, heartily, and, with a masterly selection of expression, carried into the next verse with equal happiness; for there again the feminine grace with which the joyfulness is to be attested shines with a silvery whiteness over-filming the 'red-ripe' heart beneath. Combining thus 'music and moonlight and feeling,' this song must be called perfect; and to attain this perfection in treating an exuberantly joyful subject could have been no easy matter even for one of Miss Rossetti's delicacy and acute sensibility—seeing that all expansive passion has a natural proneness to run in the direction of over-intensity, suggestive of personality—a tendency to become distasteful to the reader of average delicacy through excessive openness of expression. Reticence in songs of the affections is a gift of great price; and here we have it. 'Our sweetest songs' are said to be 'those which tell of saddest thought.' When the 'divine poet' told the world this, he uttered as true a saying as ever was

expressed in music of words—the reason of the truth lying partly in the more exquisite variety of sentiment in the region of sad thoughts than in the robust domain of happiness, and partly in the greater ease with which a melancholy burden can be kept ‘sweet’ than a glad and hearty strain can. This song of Miss Rossetti’s is not a whit sweeter than many others which she has given us: indeed there is one in the same volume which forms an exact pendant to this—holds just as much melody and apt grace of symbolism—is quite as delicate in workmanship—and is in all respects a parallel to it in sweetness; but it is a sad song—a song which tells of love, but which couples the mighty name of Love with the no less mighty name of Death. Therefore it could not in Miss Rossetti’s hands have failed of delicate sweetness, whereas the other might have been far less delicately sweet without calling for censure, and so bears away with its rapid exulting tread the palm which might else have fallen to the lot of its more lingering and sad-paced sister. This solemn little lyric—melancholy-voiced as a dying swan—has in its cadences a world of heart-heaviness:

‘When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress-tree:
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet;

And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not feel the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sing on, as if in pain:
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise nor set,
Haply I may remember,
And haply may forget.'

This burden of 'remember' and 'forget,' a very marked one, has received at the hands of Mr. Swinburne a much larger development in his poem *Rococo*—which is, curiously enough, in precisely the same measure. In the same *metre* (as we usually understand the term) it is not, for Mr. Swinburne's quatrains have double rhymes instead of single ones. In this respect Miss Rossetti, with all her great sense of execution, often misses a musical effect where one might easily be obtained. The songs just quoted are both instances of this: though nothing is lacking in either, and both are felt to be satisfyingly perfect, we could yet conceive them as being rendered more musical by a delicate use of the double-rhymed quatrain; and the same is true of many poems in which Miss Rossetti has used the quatrain form. What could be done with this metre, in the way of elaborate and yet not strained development, we learn in *Rococo*, a poem of ten such stanzas, with two burdens worked alternately in the last quatrain. The poem thus produced,

though not altogether gratifying in tone, has yet an admirable effect of music and form; and, while it is one of the most perfectly constructed of Mr. Swinburne's mosaics, it is also not in the least obtrusive of its elaborate excellence. Yet the tender purity of Miss Rossetti's gem is not cast in shadow by the flashing brilliance of *Rococo*, which after all has not this priceless purity, though not impure. This one thing Miss Rossetti always has, added to her technical qualities—this purified essence of purity. 'Untripped,' to revert to Mrs. Browning's phrase, by the feminine folds of raiment, she yet never by any movement follows the great woman-poet into any of those pardonable though ungratifying gestures which, in asserting this principle, disarrange the stately fall of the folds of womanhood's raiment more than most men would choose to have them disarranged.

Still we have not to deal with a small-voiced, timorous miss in appraising the poems of Miss Rossetti. Flesh and blood find their appropriate place in her verses, *but no more*. The tattered rags of frail humanity are not held ruthlessly up to our gaze to assert that the poet does not shrink from her task; and yet we feel that there is no such shrinking, and that the poet knows and prizes her humanity. She treats man reverently and religiously; and this much religion we expect to find in a poet—questioning, if

we do not find it, his full title to be called a poet. Miss Rossetti has, beyond this wide religion, a personal religion whereof the characteristics are discernible enough ; but instead of bringing this to bear on the general fabric of her works, and preaching what is not of wide interest, as some weaker sisters have done, she gives a quiet corner of each of her volumes to certain pieces which, without the least violence of dogmatism or narrowness of sectarianism, are yet of a more limited range than we should care to include under the broad denomination 'religious,' and are better characterised by her own sub-title of 'Devotional Pieces.' Among dogmas styled religious, that that 'all is vanity' seems to have found special favour in Miss Rossetti's eyes. In one of the pieces called 'devotional' the whole essence of *Ecclesiastes* is worked into thirteen six-lined stanzas of admirable terseness and great beauty. Wonderfully close to the words of the Bible, the poem (entitled *A Testimony*) would probably be called a paraphrase by its author ; but it is more : it is a condensed and beautified rearrangement of the philosophy of the book, such as it is ; and a fragment of this so-called philosophy is worked into a very beautiful sonnet called *The one Certainty*. A very sombre tone of thought it is that pervades these two poems ; and there is not much to covet in one's neighbour's code when such ideas form an essential part of it. Still, the work-

manship is beautiful and the thought pure, however sad.

It is necessary to point out where the Preraphaelite movement has been baneful to Miss Rossetti; for the influence of the movement has not been an unmixed good. The aim of approximating the 'actualities' of language with more than customary nearness is one which of necessity runs the artist into the shallows of proximity to commonplace; and if he hold such approximation as an ultimatum, and yet escape partial or total shipwreck on the rocks of vulgarity or bathos, he is an artist of great moderation and acuteness. To throw off conventionality and assert originality in form and style is one of the highest technical virtues of art, because it is the only means of large progress; and in this beneficial result of Preraphaelitism Miss Rossetti has performed a laudable part. Nor has she met with the shipwreck, either total or partial, to be feared from unskilful furtherance of the other aim referred to; but at the same time she does not sail with unmitigated triumph clear of the shallows of commonplace; and while she is sufficiently unconventional to have infused new blood into so conventional a form of verse as the sonnet, she has yet, in some of her more original poems, gone far too close to what is commonplace. Among other elements of 'actuality' which she has attempted to introduce into the texture of poetry are some few

expressions almost to be regarded as slang. Now some words of this ambiguous class may be brought with great effect into the vocabulary of grotesque poetry; but grotesque in poetry, to be at all good, must be executed with a hand of immense strength, and moulded into grotesqueness by means of a subtle and homogeneous tone. In Miss Rossetti's poetry, however, there is nothing that can be properly termed grotesque. The tone of her writing is almost uniformly elegant and chaste, and seriously so; and when into verse of this character expressions are introduced which would be of great effect in grotesque poetry, the result in the reader's mind is anything but favourable. In the elegant poem *Goblin Market*, for instance, we get passages of this nature, such as the description of the goblin men:

'Laughed every goblin
When they spied her peeping:
Came towards her hobbling,
Flying, running, leaping,
Puffing and blowing,
Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
Clucking and gobbling,
Mopping and mowing,
Full of airs and graces,
Pulling wry faces;'

and so on. This is not largely successful in its attempt at grotesqueness, irrespectively of the bad rhyme between 'goblin' and 'hobbling,' and of the vulgarity 'pulling wry faces;' and just as unsuccessful is the following, with an added flatness in the last line:

'One hauls a basket,
One bears a plate,
One lugs a golden dish
Of many pounds' weight.'

The poem from which this is extracted is really graceful and serious; and fortunately there is no great dilution of this sort in it: altogether this result of the 'actuality' aim is not annoying in its frequency; but yet it occasionally leads Miss Rossetti to collapse into marked flatness, and that sometimes where a *crescendo* is wanted and apparently intended: also some few poems have sprung from this aim, and been published in these volumes, such as art-lovers may well desire to see withdrawn as really valueless—there being no clear reason for their existence, in the matter of either *recherché* thought or sentiment or fine manipulation. Such are *No thank you John*, and *A Ring Posy*: the first is an ordinary enough refusal of an offer of marriage, and is somewhat flippant as well as heartless in tone. The argument is probably one followed out by many a modern miss; the execution is not at all worthy of Miss Rossetti; and the eight verses work through a variety of ordinarinesses to the final—

'Here's friendship for you if you like; but love,—
No, thank you, John.'

In *A Ring Posy* there is nothing so exceptionable as this, and there is even good execution; but unfortunately there is nothing to execute; and

unless the verses were utter music, which they are not, there could be no advantage in them, no reason for their existence.

It is now five years since Miss Rossetti's last little delicate offering of verse was issued; and her public must be getting tired of waiting for the next: in the mean time she has given us a sample of what she can do in quite another walk of art, and it may be rather interesting in this work on poetry to glance at a novellette and a few tales by one whose mission is so specially poetic: such a glance is the more desirable, as in another section the converse situation—that of a supreme novelist taking to poetry—will be treated. Those who have known Miss Rossetti's handiwork from the time when she produced her masterly abstract of *Ecclesiastes* and her exquisite sad lyric *Dream Land* up to these later years of poetic labour productive of such results as the dirge in *The Prince's Progress*, would pronounce *Commonplace*, the title of Miss Rossetti's story, as most undescriptive of anything that lady would be likely to produce in verse or prose; and while *Commonplace* is in reality a very capital title for the story, the whole book is just as far from commonplace as the author's accustomed audience would anticipate. No one will attempt to assign to this work among novellettes the same standing that Miss Rossetti's songs and sonnets take among sonnets and songs, because, as we have seen, the author

is simply the poet of female poets who has reached in England the highest point of executive merit, while one could name many women who have written novellettes superior to *Commonplace* as well in execution as in conception. We have seen that, within certain intellectual limits, Miss Rossetti's best lyrics (and very few are below the level of the best) come quite close to perfection—and this apparently because she has been content to sing her bird-like best on familiar subjects of a woman's pure experience and tender imagination: her lyrics have the air of springing from the heart of a poet who has not mixed much with the rougher world, and whose experience has yet garnered a bitter harvest of refined sorrow to be breathed out in refined strains of song; and such a lack of rougher experience while it would operate favourably on lyric labour would in certain important respects operate unfavourably on the more dramatic labour of writing a novellette. Accordingly we find the three sisters who are the chief actors in *Commonplace*, as also the accessory ladies therein, drawn with an admirable precision and insight indicative of a very acute inward and outward study of female character and motive; while the two male characters who should for perfect balance have been at least as well defined, are indicated just too faintly to take their proper standing in the reader's mind. Furthermore this tale, in the matter of laying out

and arrangement of parts, does not show that power over the medium of expression chosen that the author nearly always shows when she selects verse as the vehicle for her refined thought and exquisite sentiment; and when that has been said there is no more to say in detraction from the merits of *Commonplace*. For realising the entirety of a limited soul and for exhibiting the eager interest of lives of limited scope, and for doing this without affectation or strain or exaggeration, Miss Rossetti's novellette can only be compared to those imperishable works wherein Jane Austen portrayed the quiet country life of her own calm circle; but before the living author can sit on the same bench as her great dead predecessor occupies in the temple of fame she must develop that calm splendid faculty of laying out a book and bringing all its actors up to the same level of unmistakable vitality that we see displayed in the 'commonplaces' of *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*. For the rest, Miss Rossetti's little novel is thoroughly refined in workmanship without being *petite*,—thoroughly free from objectionable sentimentality without being bare of emotional interest. The important characteristics and events of certain lives are compressed into some hundred-and-fifty pages of prose always high in tone and quality of style, often amusing, often thoughtful, and sometimes highly artistic. She has spared us those

chapters and chapters of mere padding which stuff out to the requisite bulk so many novels with not half so much to say, and of which the small material must at all hazards be spread over three mortal volumes. Her production is clean from all taint of sensation or any other baneful thing; and, if she has definitely abandoned that high lyric walk she has walked in with so charming and lovely a grace, one cannot but wish to see her often again making longer and stronger excursions in this newer walk of prose fiction. The tales published in the same volume with *Commonplace*, though written in uniformly elegant prose, vary greatly in scope and quality. Four of them are altogether unimportant; one called *The Lost Titian*, a brilliant sketch of artist life in Venice, is very interesting; *Vanna's Twins* is a charming and pathetic little bit of quiet life at Hastings, but much too short and limited; while a story called *The Waves of this Troublesome World* has in small the fine qualities of *Commonplace*, applied a grade lower down in the social scale, the scene being among fisher-people (at Hastings also). The genuine human element, happily preponderant, is admirable in this tale; but the piece has a purpose injurious to the artistic effect, on account of its uneasy consciousness and narrow sectarianism. The moral of the story is—'You should not leave 'the Church of England to marry a methodist pho-





h
17

‘tographer and become a methodist yourself; but if
‘you do, and your husband and child both die, you
‘must take those facts as gentle chastisements of the
‘good shepherd whose will is that there be but one
‘fold, and you must return accordingly to the bosom
‘of the established Church.’ This is the only point
for serious objection in the whole book; and even
this didactic sin is of a very mild nature.

There is one region into which Miss Rossetti’s
prose carries her better than her verse does—that
region, namely, situate between the semi-ridiculous
and the semi-pathetic that may be entered with
admirable effect in prose but which it is both difficult
and hazardous to essay in verse. In verse, once and
again, she has attempted as already noted to walk
steadily there, but not with success: in this volume
of tales, however, there are numerous instances of a
certain half grotesque simplicity of incident treated
with a naïveté that makes the reader ready to laugh
at first and ends by moving him profoundly. There
is a very pretty sample of this in *The Waves of this
Troublesome World*, when Miss Rossetti’s methodist,
who, in justice be it stated, is a particularly fine
fellow, is about to quit Hastings—his unavowed but
evident suit dismissed by the father of the girl he
loves. He meets the said girl by chance on his way,
bids her good-bye, and tells her his reasons for de-
parture, somewhat to her surprise, and also explains

how he was not sure *she* would say 'no,' for all her father had told him.

'Again he said, "good-bye;" but Sarah said, "Stuff! you know, John, I can't answer 'Yes' or 'No' till you ask me something."

So in the field-path John asked, and Sarah answered. Then from gate to gate along the steaming fields, whilst haymakers rested and birds sat silent in the noon heat, they two walked, talking earnestly.'

There is a good deal of this sort of thing in the chief story, and nothing of the obviously didactic sort; but whatever *Commonplace* may yield of pleasure and profit, it is a very sad reflection that there is no power in society to *compel* the author back into that path she has followed to such admirable purpose. Let us hope she will go back of her own free will, and delight us once more with some of her imperishable lyric masterpieces.



IX.

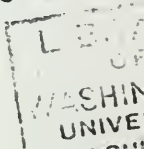
COVENTRY PATMORE.

'The perfect preciseness of thought and observation, the delicate *tournure*, alternately gay and sober, and the gnomie sagacity which make many passages in his poems live in the memory of all appreciative readers, should have earned by this time a respectful indulgence for the facile platitude into which he too often falls.'—

J. BURNELL PAYNE.

COVENTRY PATMORE.

MR. COVENTRY PATMORE'S name is noteworthy as connected with a marked divergence from the original Preraphaelite ideal in poetry. This ideal, as set forth in the printed proclamation of the brotherhood, was calculated to do a great deal of good in combination with the downright earnestness and fervid intellectuality of some of the brothers; but we all know how impossible it is, especially in art, to lay down laws which shall be similarly binding on all who profess belief in them—consequently how little real coherence there can be between a number of works produced by different hands. Any novice who might be told that Mr. Coventry Patmore was a Preraphaelite poet would stare aghast if the informant, after giving him samples of Mr. Patmore's work, should then turn to the poetry of Mr. D. G. Rossetti and say, 'This also is Preraphaelite poetry.' The principle recognised by the brothers, that 'a rigid adherence to the simplicity of Nature' is to be 'enforced' in writing poetry, and that poems are to be 'conceived in the spirit, or with the intent, of exhibiting a pure and unaffected style,' seems clear enough at



first sight, and is certainly wholesome at second, third, or any other sight; but after the first glance the question suggests itself, What is Nature? And again, What is to be understood—contemporary Nature, or Nature more primitive? And after that again a more sinister suggestion arises,—Whether in laying down rigidly that one will accept only such things of one's own or others' writing as are of a 'pure and unaffected style,' it may not possibly come to pass that an affectation of unaffectedness—a cloudy, muddy, or impure struggle after purity—should supervene? If such suggestions are borne in upon the mind of the outsider, how much more potent must be the influence of the strong individuality of fervent artist-spirits in setting aside, by idiosyncrasy of interpretation, anything like a law meant to be binding! Thus, while Mr. Coventry Patmore might conceive of Nature as an entity seen in perfection of simplicity in Sarum Close, heard and scented in perfection of simplicity in the rustle of Honoria's silks and the fragrance of her cambric handkerchiefs within the deanery parlour, Mr. Woolner, another distinguished Preraphaelite, might find it hard to conceive of the same entity as dissociable from fresh meadows and ideas remote from the paraphernalia of modern courtship. Thus also, while Mr. Coventry Patmore might think no affectation existed in talking of 'gems and loveliest cheer' as an Elizabethan lyrist might

have talked, Mr. Woolner might deem the absence of affectation to be best shown in straining after such a simplicity of introduction as 'I love my lady; she is very fair.' But such persons as understand an unaffected saying to be a thing said quite naturally, or, in speaking of poetry, a line shaped as it came burning from the poet's very soul, would fail to see these two samples as other than very affected indeed, though both come from poems of high merit. Mr. Coventry Patmore has published nothing which comes nearer to executive perfection than the little poem in *The Germ* whose sole defect is the introduction of 'gems and loveliest cheer.' But neither this nor two other sufficiently charming poems of Mr. Patmore's in the same collection would it be easy to trace to the hand which afterwards produced *The Angel in the House*—a work wherein the author had set himself a certain task, concerning the accomplishment of which posterity must pass the final verdict; for whether the poem be or be not eventually set among unachieved tasks, its indisputable excellences are too prominent to admit of its being quite slighted by the writer's own generation.

The hand that produced *The Angel in the House* is far more clearly discernible in the volume of poems put forth by the author in 1844, and several of which are reprinted in a modified form in that exquisite specimen of cheap literature the fourth edition of *The*

In the street a man since stopped me : in a noble foreign tongue
He said he was a stranger, poor, and strangers all among.
I know your thoughts, yet tell you, World,—I gave him all I had.
But I—I'm much the wisest;—it is you, O World ! that's mad.

He stared upon the proffered purse ; then took it, hand and all.
O ! what a look he gave me, while he kept my hand in thrall !
And press'd it with a gratitude that made the blushes start ;
For I had not deserved it, and it smote me to the heart.'

In this collection of work done before the planting of the Preraphaelite banner the chief influence traceable is that of Browning and our great woman-poet: the style of the four chief poems has a wonderful resemblance to that of Mrs. Browning's earlier poems, such as *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*, *The Lay of the Brown Rosary*, *A Romance of the Ganges*, &c.; though even Mrs. Browning (then Miss Barrett) never rivalled Mr. Patmore in the wilful and daring unfinish of these his early poems. Browning's influence is seen principally in *The Woodman's Daughter*, wherein some not very startling incidents of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* (published the year before) are adopted, together with two of the names, Merton and Gerald (for Mertoun and Gerard)—while Maud stands instead of Mildred and is not so very far off it in sound.

Midway in manner between those poems and *The Angel*, but nearer to that than to those, stands *Tamerton Church-tower* : the 'romaunt' tone has quite faded from Mr. Patmore's work there; and he has struck into the path of contemporary triviality (or, to

use a milder and perhaps correcter word, colloquiality) of speech that finds its worst perfection in Sarum Close and the deanery parlour. The double-rhyming ballad metre of *Tamerton Church-Tower*, with its neat glibness and unflagging briskness of step, though not easy to adapt to solemnity of theme, is less opposed to solemnity than is the stock metre of the *Betrothal* and *Espousals* ;* and although the poet seldom has any *weight* of melody at his command, this poem has some very fine passages, blended so well with its sprightly and not inelegant diction that no incongruity is felt. There is a masterly piece of foreshadowing near the beginning, at the point where the friends are shown as waiting, midway on a journey, in expectation of a storm :

‘ The string of rooks had travell’d on,
Against the southern shroud,
And, like some snaky skeleton,
Lay twisted in the cloud.’

This grim emblem of death is hung in the vision of the youth who is hurrying eagerly to see a girl whom he has never met and yet knows he shall love ; and this, with the emphatic and solemn mention of the sea, near the end of the journey,

‘ In front, between the gaping heights,
The mystic ocean hung.’

suffice, with the assistance of a few other touches, to take off the brusqueness of the surprise, that must

* See extracts further on.

otherwise have seized the reader, on coming to the dreadful tragedy of the poor girl's death while on her marriage tour (for of course the youth's dream of love comes true). The description of the storm in which these hapless young people are caught while out in a pleasure-boat is graphic and powerful in the extreme; and yet, when one gets to the end of it, and reads

‘The sea fell in from stern to prow
And Blanche, my Bride, was drown’d,’

there is after all a certain suddenness of shock for which, it is clear, we have to thank the difficulty of the poet's excellent light craftsmanship for adaptation to deeply tragic or momentous subjects.

The poet's task in *The Angel in the House*, as far as one can understand it, was to carry the high tone of poetic treatment into the almost unploughed land of married life and married love. The love chosen almost invariably for treatment in literary art has been love before marriage, or illicit love after marriage; and even in the epics of modern times—to which title contemporary fictions have a certain claim—the interest, so far as these books relate to love properly so called, and not to adultery, murder, and sudden death, centres generally round the *obtaining* of the woman or man desired, and not round the *life with* that woman or man. This would have been a noble achievement for any poet—to have shown by

practical demonstration that the true interest of life begins with the early years of marriage, to grow greater and greater up the hill and down the slope again to death, instead of beginning with the first flush of passion and finishing at about the middle of the honeymoon. This latter has certainly been a pretty general conception of the interest of love in literary art; and why so it is very hard to say precisely and conclusively. Some part of the explanation doubtless lies in the more vivid material action to be obtained from a courtship than from a marriage, and from the consequently greater difficulty in rendering poetical treatments of married life thoroughly poetical and truly interesting. The poet who selects for analysis and delineation the relations of two young persons who become acquainted with each other, 'fall in love,' and gradually work through the various difficulties till they reach the married state, has obviously a moderately large range of material incidents, as well as psychical phenomena, to select from; whereas, by the time the pair have become one, the most striking of the material incidents usually accepted as interesting have been used up; and the poet who chooses to take his subject in hand at this stage is thrown more on his powers of analysis of character than on those of representing action, unless he betake himself indeed to the tragic treatment of conjugal faithlessness. This has of course been often

done, and not seldom nobly done ; but the new subject open for Mr. Patmore, and attractive to him, was the faithful love of man and wife—what fast young women and gay young men of the present day might term the humdrum existence of a couple of married fogies. The orthodox poet of love, as hitherto known to us, has rung the changes on the various phases of passion not at first requited, and dauntlessly winning its reward,—on the various misunderstandings between youth and maiden leading to all sorts of pleasing and interesting miseries on either side, or both,—on the many provoking interferences of parents and guardians, and the still more provoking interferences of poverty, or of pride that regards as poverty anything less than wealth. But all these fruitful fields are closed to the man who takes up two lives at their point of union, and depicts them from that point. Instead of these, he must content himself with plucking his fruits in such fields that average youth will cry upon him as uninteresting to the last degree, although, if he be sufficiently powerful in imagination, sufficiently keen in analytical instinct, sufficiently genial in sympathy with a noble married love, he may, with a proper amount of faculty more strictly executive, rise to the production of a kind of poetry that will show to sobered fathers and mothers of families that their life also is picturesque and has its poetic sublimity,—that they also may attain to

the setting of the homely incidents of household existence to a music transcending in calm intensity the ruffled depth and heat of young passion-music.

As regards the executive faculties, which would be absolutely necessary for the flawless ennoblement of so serious a subject as the psychical contact of man and woman in daily life together—a subject so easily lapsing into mere platitude as the routine of married life in its more material aspect—as regards the limits within which it would be needful for a poet to confine himself to avoid the rendering of all these things eminently commonplace, the clearest law a critic can lay down is That the fabric of the work be such that no line, nay no *word*, should be open to the charge of redundancy, or even of not being indispensable. Every poem, and above all every poem dealing with subjects of difficult delicacy, should bear a weight of appropriateness in each word; form should never be sacrificed to the conveniences of thought, nor thought to the conveniences of form, and every turn should carry its own convicting burden of earnestness.

Are these things so with *The Angel in the House*? I think not. The volume embodies numerous sterling thoughts on the relationships of man to woman, and of woman to man; but it has also been thrown open as a refuge for many desultory platitudes which seem to have suggested themselves to the author's

mind as worthy to be embodied in strips of lyric—what shall one say? Well, it is useless to try to generalise on this point, for the quality of *The Angel in the House* at its best is high,—at its worst, miserably low. Mr. Patmore seems to have worked under a somewhat unusual disturbing influence—a struggle, namely, between fine instinct and propriety of lyric feeling on the one hand, and, on the other, a recognition by the intellect that the homely and commonplace elements of life, thought, and speech are to be ‘sought out and set in order.’ I am impressed with the idea that, when he followed his genuine instinct, he produced those many dainty little pieces that show how some slight incident, of no great picturesqueness, has its poetical side if viewed in the light of a delicate mind; and that it was when he wrote without spontaneity of feeling that the many disfigurements were produced, for the sole use, as I cannot but think, of teaching the impossibility of giving poetic beauty to things that are utterly trivial and prosaic.

Mr. Patmore appears to have laboured under the impression that a part of the poet’s mission is to say smart things, and make the most of all those little unimportant brilliancies that come flashing upon a wakeful intellect at every turn in thinking out a subject; and to meet, seemingly, these requirements, the two ‘books’ composing Part I. of the work,

namely *The Betrothal* and *The Espousals*, were laid out in the most eccentric manner—the short lyric spurts of narration forming each ‘canto’ being always introduced by other short lyric spurts called *Preludes*, of a didactic character and of about the same aggregate size as the narrative portions themselves. In the two ‘books’ of Part II., *Faithful for Ever* and *The Victories of Love*, this dreadful form was abandoned for that of letters in *Hudibras*-metre, written by the various actors in the lyric narratives of Part I. The fifth *prelude* of the first *canto* of the first *book* of the first *part* (O how ineffably barbarous !) ends with a beautiful aspiration beautifully expressed :

‘Thou Primal Love, who grantest wings
And voices to the woodland birds,
Grant me the power of saying things
Too simple and too sweet for words !’

And surely nothing less than the conviction that the power sought had somehow been bestowed could possibly have so far robbed the acute Mr. Patmore of discrimination as to permit him to write many things afterwards written. What shall one think of this that follows ?

‘While thus I grieved, and kiss’d her glove,
My man brought in her note to say,
Papa had bid her send his love,
And would I dine with them next day ?
They had learn’d and practised Purcell’s glee,
To sing it by to-morrow night.
The Postscript was : Her sisters and she
Enclosed some violets, blue and white ;

She and her sisters found them where
I wager'd once no violets grew ;
So they had won the gloves. And there
The violets lay, two white, one blue.'

Very neatly done, be it noted ; and no doubt to the heart of the lover these small matters of invites and postscripts and glove-wagers and violets are 'too simple and too sweet for words.' Why then try to find, of all things, *poetic* words for them, and fail so egregiously ? When the 'gardener's daughter' gives the rose to the youth entranced before her beauty, we feel a weight in the masterly way wherein the giving of the gift is pieced into the modest dimensions of a perfect fabric ; and we understand what the Laureate meant we should understand—the marking of an important stage in the suit, the granting, or at least the *not* denying, of the first boon craved. But these other glove and violet matters come in merely as part of a desultory, gossipy poem, and one can only, looking at the manner of saying, accept them for gossip.

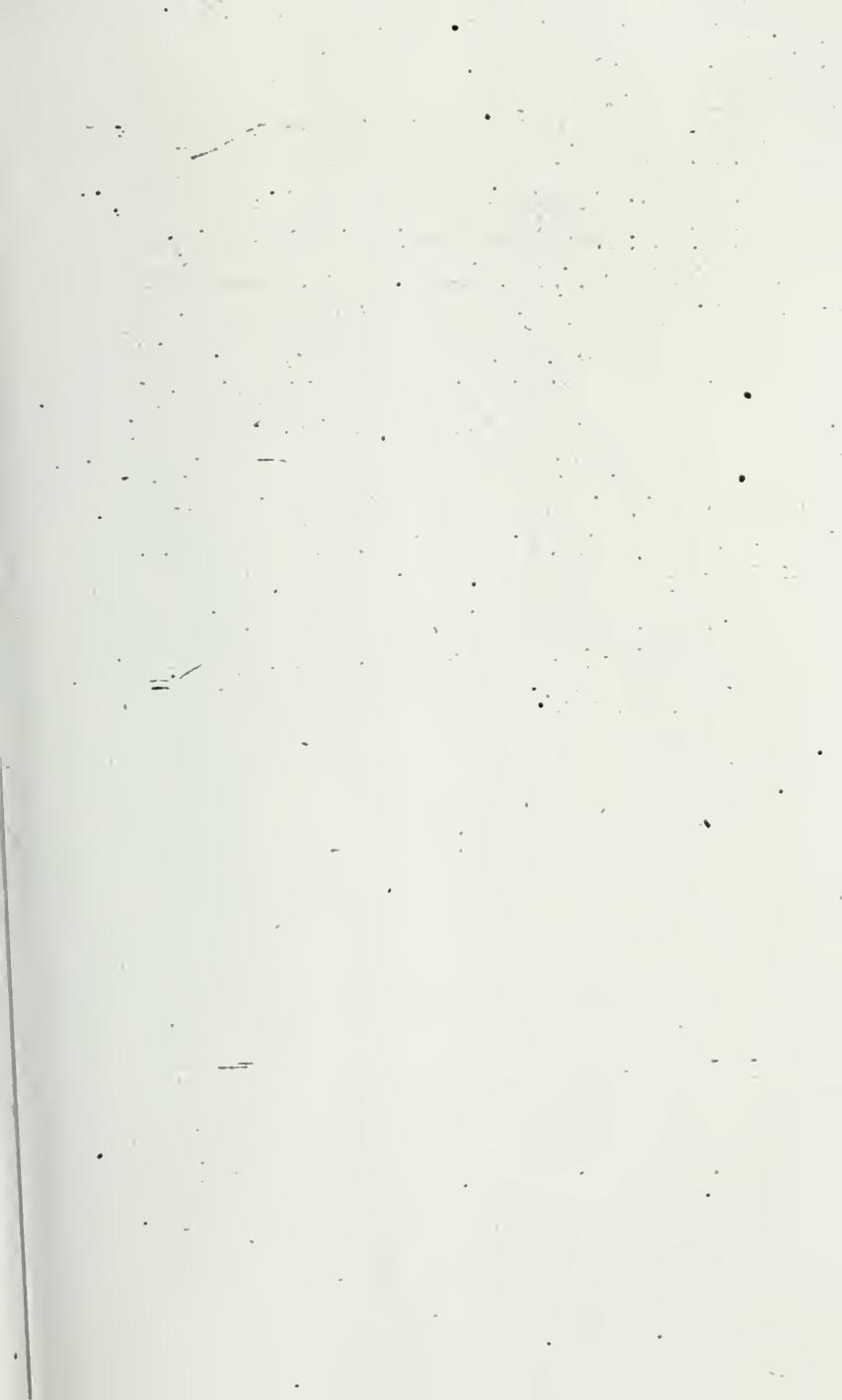
But in this same work Mr. Patmore has got infinitely beyond these things, and has shown so delicately how slight touches of life may be made poetical, that the flaws of his book, so many and so great, are the more tantalising. It is difficult to over-praise the cunning simplicity with which the going on to the beach (immediately on arrival at the seaside after marriage) is touched :

'I, while the shop-girl fitted on
 The sand-shoes, look'd where, down the bay,
 The sea glow'd with a shrouded sun.
 "I'm ready, Felix; will you pay?"
 That was my first expense for this
 Sweet stranger whom I call'd my Wife,
 How light the touches are that kiss
 The music from the chords of life!

 Her feet, by half-a-mile of sea,
 In spotless sand left shapely prints;
 With agates, then, she loaded me,
 (The lapidary call'd them flints;)
 Then, at her wish, I hail'd a bont,
 To take her to the ships-of-war,
 At anchor, each a lazy mote
 Black in the brilliance, miles from shore.'

Those two stanzas are perfect in their way. They reach the standard of beauty *without* affectation and *with* naturalism, and bear the traces, not of rapid transcription of laxly-thought ideas, but of the careful—perhaps half-conscious—weighing of words and compression of ideas to be found in all good poetry, and found, paradoxically enough be it spoken, in combination with perfect ease. The words 'shop-girl,' 'sand-shoes,' 'pay,' and 'expense,' unpoetical words all of them, bear each its own peculiar burden of poetry as here employed, and never fell into the order they stand in but with that rapid and fervent thought which poets undergo in poetising. And there are numberless far better things than this scattered through the poem, though it takes no greatness of shape or completeness of scheme when looked at as a whole. If Mr. Patmore had given us a book about

a quarter of the length of *The Angel in the House*, if he had never stooped to indulge in gossipy detail told off-hand, if he had never let a verse go from him without watchfully compacting it and guarding it from outgrowths of the mushroom order, if he had been able to forego the indulgence of writing clever pieces of discursive prose-in-verse, and if the Angel had been admitted into the House near the beginning of the work, without all the ordinary tedious courtship business,—then his true ideas on married love, his delicate intelligence of certain of the shallower depths of female character, might have sufficed to insure the result being held hereafter to mark an epoch in the history of poetry.



X.

THOMAS WOOLNER.

'Art, driven out with ignominy, will yet return, and there is nothing so artificial as artlessness.'—J. BURNELL PAYNE.

THOMAS WOOLNER.

MR. WOOLNER's one poem, *My Beautiful Lady*, is a truly beautiful book: there need be no doubt as to what verdict posterity will pass on it; nor have I any scruple in applying to it precisely those *criteria* whereunder *The Angel in the House* strikes me as falling short. It is a book whose every turn *does* carry its own convicting burden of earnestness. The critic may fairly say that, of the fabric of the work, no portions are open to the charge of redundancy or of not being indispensable; that as a general rule the work does bear a weight of appropriateness in every word; and that in it thought is never sacrificed to the conveniences of form, or form to the conveniences of thought. It is in many respects the direct antithesis of Mr. Patmore's work: we see in *My Beautiful Lady* a severity without coldness, a simplicity without commonplace, a warmth of colour and detail without fumes and twaddle, and a great firmness of texture.

To such readers as are unacquainted with the book, it may be said that in form it has a certain parallelism with *Maud* and *In Memoriam*—not, be it observed, in the matter of execution, for there Mr.

Woolner at his best stands distinctly apart from the author of those works: the parallelism is in this, that, whether regarded as a lyric outbreathing of experience, or as a dramatic rendering of invented situation and soul-life, the poem of the sculptor is, equally with *Maud* and *In Memoriam*, a series of versified thoughts and feelings pertaining to one personality, and setting forth the passage of that personality through a considerable space of time. In variety of versification it assimilates *Maud*, though in matter of craftsmanship not standing for a moment in competition with that superb work; while, in smallness of action, largeness of intellectuality, and depth of personal feeling, it rather assimilates sufficiently the other noble work named to suggest the idea that it is a veritable threnody for a real lost love. The passages which strike me as the most highly valuable are those wherein the Preraphaelite tone is at its strongest; although a matured mind has given maturity to even those portions, in touching out of them some peculiarities which, in their first stage as known to us, were not seen as beauties but merely as peculiarities. There are portions of later birth altogether in which Preraphaelitism is barely traceable, and especially blank-verse passages, paying tribute to the mosaic manner of the Laureate's best idylls. These passages are full of original thought and individual expression; and if one values them less than the lyric

passages, it is because they recognise a code of craftsmanship that seems to set less readily into the current of Mr. Woolner's genius. They have somewhat the air of a man's comment on his earlier self; as if the first fervour of youth and youthful art, which made it possible for a man to select his art-course, had been crushed out, and, if reawakened, turned so strongly into other channels that the desire to create fresh forms of poetry again had not asserted itself,—so that the comment on the former self must come to us in a form perfected meanwhile by another poet, of an entirely distinct order from the poets of whom Mr. Woolner at first aspired to be one, and was one.

These blank-verse passages are full of beauties; and with no slight to them, one may deem more costly the utterly original manner and tender matter of the lyrical portions. It is impossible not to admire sentiment such as the following, so set forth :

It much behoves us all, but chiefly those
Whom fate has favoured with an easy trust,
They keep a bridle on their restive speech
And thought: and not in plunging haste prejudge
The first presentment as the rounded truth.
For true it is, that rapid thoughts, and freak
Of skimming word, and glance, more frequently
Than either malice, settled hate, or scorn,
Support confusion, and pervert the right;
Set up the weakling in the strong man's place;
And yoke the great one's strength to idleness;
Pour gold into the squanderer's purse, and suck
The wealth, which is a power, from their control
Who would have turned it unto noble use.
And oftentimes a man will strike his friend,

By random verbiage, acuter pain
 Than could a foe, yet scarcely mean him wrong;
 For none can strip this complex masquerade
 And know who languishes with secret wounds.'

The passages referred to are the general introduction, a special introduction to the First Part, headed *Love*, and the whole of the Third Part, namely, two sections entitled *Years after* and *Work*. *Years after* is an idyll in form, and a very charming and thoughtful one; and the whole of the blank-verse portions are full of fine thought and feeling well set forth; but there are other passages which stand between these and the lyric portions of *My Beautiful Lady*, as having in themselves a strong lyric element far removed from the style of idyllic poetry—such, for instance, as the section called *Noon*, after the pulsating rapture of the accepted lover has been allowed to settle down from an unclassifiable metre to an inspiration in iambics addressed, lover-like, to the wind:

'Whisper deliciously the trembling flowers:
 O could I fill thy vacancy as I
 Am filled with happiness, thou'dst breathe such sounds
 Their blooms should wane and waver sick for love.'

But the most beautiful and most lyric passage comes properly as the climax and justification of all this; and it might, for luxuriant adoration and music of loving, have occurred in an Italian love-song rather than in a northern production by a worker in marble:

'For Love's own voice has owned her love is mine ;
And Love's own palm has pressed my palm to hers ;
Love's own deep eyes have looked the love she spoke :
And Love's young heart to mine was fondly beating
As from her lips I sucked the sweet of life.'

Without intending to be impertinent, I crave indulgence for the observation that, in this almost perfect passage, the word 'fondly' and the double ending of the fourth line appear a little intrusive. The word 'fondly' wants weight, and the double ending breaks unity; whereas both things would have been avoided had the line stood, 'And Love's young heart was beating to my heart.' Such a slight flaw is only too well worth noting, because this kind of poetising can never by possibility be charged with the gossipy platitude laid at Mr. Patmore's door, nor of the headlong production of commonplaces and crude so-called naturalisms put to the count of the same poet. The texture of this verse is carefully guarded against that obtrusive realism which is generally a mere shelter for slovenliness—a pretext for verse-writing when the writer is in a common prose mood—an excuse for 'stringing blethers up in rhyme for fools to sing,' instead of waiting with patient earnestness on the footsteps of the Muse; or rather of the poet's own soul, till such time as real, vital, fiery poetry be trod out in an atmosphere of necessary rhythm. When that happy time of production does come, the real poet—he who is a poet in his inmost heart, and not

•

by sole virtue of a faculty to sing a little—holds himself firmly in order, and sets his judgment to keep a guard over his more fervent emotional nature; and it is then we get verse that is worth the getting.

Now when Mr. Woolner's lyric mood has come upon him, the weight of his judgment seems to have set in the direction of giving the form of his verse an air of almost negligent simplicity: his singing has taken the most obvious cadences, and intricacy seems never to have ventured near him. And yet withal there is an artistic cunning in the very nakedness of his versification—a nakedness suggestive at times of work in marble that is simple and grand and white, as in these stanzas, for instance:

‘How grand and beautiful the love
 She silently conceals,
 Nor save in act reveals!
 She broods o’er kindness; as a dove
 Sits musing in the nest
 Of the* life beneath her breast.

The ready freshness that was known
 In man’s authentic prime,
 The earliest breath of time,
 Throughout her household ways is shown;•
 Mild greatness subtly wrought
 With quaint and childlike thought.’

My Beautiful Lady sustains a quality quite as high as this throughout its lyrical portions, and not unfre-

* Here again severity seems slightly impaired by the redundant syllable.

quently rises far higher in many ways, as in the almost fantastic delicacy of the section entitled *Her Shadow*—a section combining Mr. Woolner's unflinching thoughtfulness and unflagging tenderness with a very sweet conceit. In walking out with his lady the lover is affrighted by some suggestions of her shadow; in returning homeward he is at peace, her shadow having fallen forgotten behind; and in loitering towards the porch, where there is a dial formed of a figure of Psyche, he pauses in an ecstasy over the twin shadows of Psyche and his lady cast on 'the flower-edged gravel way.'

Still, of the treasures of this volume, the most costly are, perhaps, those two sections which came forth in 1850 in *The Germ*. The first of these pieces, published under the name now borne by the whole book, tells of the lady's perfection and of her lover's suit; and the whole is fraught with a finely-blended chivalric medievalism and Wordsworthian naturalism—still guarding that peculiarly cunning nakedness of versification noted above. The same may be said of the other piece, originally put forth as sole pendant to the first, under the title *My Lady in Death*, which it still keeps. The first portion is as delicate in its warmth as work by Miss Christina Rossetti, and as unmistakable in its sense of execution; and the lover's avowal is very finely given. The final verse of this is highly suggestive:

'The rest I keep : a holy charm, a source
Of secret strength and comfort on my course.
Her glory left my pathway bright ;
And stars on stars throughout the night
Came blooming into light.'

It is instructive to compare the original version of these two sections with the version of the book : there are in the two *Germ* poems several uncouth realisms which, though highly valuable for their deep and warm sincerity, added nothing to the beauty of the pieces, and have been modified. The last verse of the first section appears in *The Germ* thus :

'The rest is gone ; it seemed a whirling round—
No pressure of my feet upon the ground :
But even when parted from her, bright
Showed all ; yea, to my throbbing sight
The dark was starred with light.'

The *abandon* of youth that confesses the utter confusion of the moment's rapture in a successful suit, when

'Each breast swelled with its pleasure, and her whole
Bosom grew heavy with love,'

contrasts finely with the mature 'canniness' implied in the words, 'the rest I keep,' &c.

As the book stands now, many tender and beautiful things are inserted between the suggestive conclusion quoted above and the section *My Lady in Death* ; and, after that section, the idea of his Lady's posthumous influence, so finely foreshadowed in the stanza 'The rest I keep,' &c., receives a very full development.

But the simple beauties of the lover's joy and rapture in his living lady are less musical, perhaps, than the simple beauties of his sorrow in deeming of her as dead. The music of sorrow is never exhausted; and almost every true poet appears to rise to his highest beauties in dealing with grief, whatever altitudes he may attain in the treatment of joy. The *Lover's Complaint* remains to us as the most richly musical of all the poems of our mightiest man; the *Ode to the West Wind* exhibits in 'the tumult of its mighty harmonies' a deeper, fuller, more antiphonal concourse of words than is usual even in the work of the supreme singer Shelley; and Mrs. Browning never produced anything more perfect to the ear than the words of the dying *Catarina to Camoens*, and the sad-toned *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. It is even so that the severe melody of Mr. Woolner attains its upper limit in the saddest section of his sad poem. I extract the two following stanzas from that section:

' Grass thickens proudly o'er that breast,
Clay-cold and sadly still,
My happy face felt thrill.
How much her dear, dear mouth expressed!
And now are closed and set
Lips which my own have met!
Her eyelids by the damp earth pressed!
Damp earth weighs on her eyes;
Damp earth shuts out the skies.
My Lady rests her heavy, heavy rest.
To see her high perfection sweep
The favoured earth, as she
With welcoming palms met me!

How can I but recall and weep?

Her hands' light charm was such,
Care vanished at their touch.

Her feet spared little things that creep;

"For stars are not," she'd say,

"More wonderful than they."

And now she sleeps her heavy, heavy sleep.

Mr. Woolner has not chosen untouched matter to work upon. He has not, as Mr. Coventry Patmore has, attempted to tread out a new track in respect of subject; but has struck into the good old path of unwedded love and sorrow for the loss of the beloved, and has reached a bourne concerning which there is no doubt, instead of resting from his labours with a dubious cloud hanging over the result, and with certain ugly features of such result only too insufficiently shrouded. The falling of a poet's choice on one or another of two noble subjects is matter for neither praise nor blame; and yet the difficulty of Mr. Patmore's subject was so much greater than that of Mr. Woolner's that, had the former done as well as the latter, a critic might easily have justified to himself the award of a higher meed of praise to him whose path was most beset with stumbling-blocks. Newness of sphere with perfection of art must ever command unlimited *κῆδος*: so also must a new perfection of art elaborated in an old sphere. Critics need never fear to sin by giving too hearty commendation to a poet of true originality and fresh method, even if they may be aware of a poetry that

shall be higher than that they are praising. Only a very little poetry ever comes into being unoppressed by the existence of greater verse of old; but we have not, therefore, a right to slight what our age vouchsafes to us, and sulk at humanity at large for not evolving another Shakespeare, or a second Æschylus, or a new Dante: 'for Nature brings not back the Mastodon, nor we those' men. Mr. Woolner's poetry is pure, real, vital, individual. It has its points of affinity with certain other poetry; but it does not lose itself over any man's borders. Wordsworth is the man of all others for whom the originating of Mr. Woolner's poetry might by possibility be improperly claimed, simply by virtue of the common aim of 'returning to nature'—the aim which has characterised so many great reactions in art; but Wordsworth's 'natural simplicity,' as every one knows, betrayed his great mind into many tediousnesses (to use a mild word); and the most charming lyrical results of his yearning after the real may be set beside much of *My Beautiful Lady*, without casting a shadow over the originality of the sculptor's way of holding by 'nature.' The peculiar artistic nakedness of melody already dwelt and insisted on has no note borrowed from another man: therefore Mr. Woolner stands in his place among the men whom the critic of verse delighteth to honour; and it is hard to say what he might not have done in poetry, had not Sculpture stepped in and claimed him as her own.



XI.

WILLIAM BELL SCOTT.

King Solomon.—I pray thee counsel me wherewith to beguile the time.

Attendant.—So please my Lord there be but now come to the town certain companies of minstrels; whereof they that make the goodliest music keep not their mouths from lewdness of speech; and they whose words be wise and wholesome make not the goodliest of music, though they be excellent craftsmen.

King Solomon.—Admit them that be discreet and sage of speech; for sweet-sounding lewdness is verily a hidden leprosy, and he that singeth wiseliest singeth goodliest in the ears of the wise.'

Solomon, a Mystery-Play.

WILLIAM BELL SCOTT.

THE name of Mr. W. B. Scott is very well known to the public—at least to a large section—as connected with various matters in the domain of art; but it is perhaps in that walk wherein he most excels that he is at present least appreciated. As a painter, as a critic, as a biographer, as an etcher, and as a poet, his name has been more or less before the public these thirty years and more; and it seems to me that his poetry is almost more remarkable for subtle qualities of imagination, piercing insight, and extreme tenderness in dealing with nature, than his beautiful imaginative and poetic etchings are for delicacy of execution. For while it is hard to find in these times etchings approaching his in the exquisite success with which fine pictorial imaginings are embodied so as to set forth the thought symmetrically and emphasise in mere black and white the variety of textures,—it is at least as difficult to find verse dealing with high themes with insight and daring equal to his. That his poems have had an influence on younger poets is unquestionable; and that those poems should not be at present within easy reach of the public is both astonishing and regretworthy.

In the year 1838 he published a notable little volume containing two poems, *Hades, or the Transit*, and *The Progress of Mind, an Ode*; and while both poems bore marks of homage done to the genius of Shelley, these marks were only such as added beauty without suggesting dependence, while the muscular intellectuality and lofty imagination of the verses was such as bore the most emphatic witness of the advent of a true original poet. Indeed originality and breadth of view are the characteristics that strike first and most distinctly on taking up anything of Mr. Scott's; and in his poem *Hades* this is neither more nor less so than elsewhere. But it may be confessed at once without reserve, rather than left for the reader to find out (as he will further on), that this poet's subjects are often of an order unlikely to appeal to the popular taste. Moreover, so that his thought be fine and noble, as it always is, he seems at times to think it no great matter whether he clothes it in the best words he happens to have in stock or re-dresses it from time to time in fitter words than the first; and this gives some of his works an air of nonchalance which, though an earnest of wholesome independence, is not an unmixed good, because it sometimes leaves a little roughness or ruggedness of expression. In 1846 *Hades* was followed by a more important work, *The Year of the World, a Philosophical Poem on*

Redemption from the Fall, and of both these poems it may be said without offence that they are too subtly intellectual for all their collected beauties to appeal very far beyond the range of those in whose lives poetry is a vital and indispensable reality. To such select circle these fine works, precious indeed and matter of much delight, may always be restricted in their *direct* influence; but for the later volume of *Poems by a Painter*, issued in 1854, one may with fair probability predict a warm welcome, should the author please to republish it at this time when poetry is fast reasserting its old claims and reconquering the place in the popular mind so long almost entirely usurped by the trashy fiction of the day.

Hades, from any point of view an extraordinary poem, opens in a strain sufficiently obvious in its manner of cadence to indicate that Shelley held over the soul of Mr. Scott just that inspiring but unimportant sway that he held over all the fine poets who followed immediately in his wake, as traceable in their works; and the thought expressed in this opening betrays enough of the vatic exaltation of the seer to show at once that no slavish imitation—of any models the most exquisite—is to be expected here:

‘The great Tree of Life with its lustrous flowers,
Sprang from the nurture of Death’s black showers.
From the dead worm the insect grew;
For still decay creates anew;

And the great Spirit changeth none,
While Death, the formless god, alone
Ministers beneath his throne'

This poem furnishes the key-note of a 'sane and sacred' harmony, reiterated in different forms throughout the poet's pages, and perhaps best characterised as a manly recognition of the benignity of death. The philosophic mind, so seldom blent in fulness with the poetic mind, can see the true greatness of that inevitable term of personality that is so dread a stumbling-block in the minds of those who look at life from the point of view of pure enjoyment, and regard with a pagan sadness all that is not enjoyment; and, with the exception of Walt Whitman, there is no poet of our day who has expressed so large and brave a view of death as may be drawn from the aggregate of Mr. Scott's poems. In *Hades* his ideas on this subject scarcely show in maturity: though the poem betrays a firm will to grapple with the subject and owns no abject possibility of defeat for aught so grand as a human soul, it ends with shadowiness and peradventure. The quaint situation chosen (if 'situation' anything so unreal can be called) is the awakening, by the angel of death, of three newly-buried men—a Mussulman, a Christian, and a Jew—who are hurried together through a weird phantasmagory of human sights and sounds, mixed with others of a purely ideal order; until at last their wail to

'utterly cease to be,
Nor live in the throes of memory,'

is stilled by a 'blessed swoon of music;' and the poet continues :

'The wanderers beneath that melody
Slept with delicious joy away.
And what was the song
That bore along
These spirits with a power so strong?
Would I could repeat the lay
In the light of upper day;
And unwreath both warp and woof
Of this web of conscious life,
And tear all sensuous thoughts aloof,
And all entanglement of strife;
Then weave it again with the amaranth flower,
And dye it with nepenthè bloom,
That man might know not sorrow's hour,
Nor fear the gods beyond the tomb!'

It would be idle to say that the poem maintains throughout the level of beauty reached here; for there is just a little disappointment even in passing from this point to the imminent close. Serious and deep as is the frame of mind the poet had to set forth, we yet find at the end of the poem a sample of the perversity Mr. Scott not unfrequently displays in the matter of form. One would have expected the peradventure of the last strophe to have been set forth with beauty equal to any beauty in the poem; and the awkward quaintness of some of the closing lines tries the exacting sense of sound and comeliness.

The Year of the World is one of the most am-

bitious of poems composed in these days. The metaphysical and mystical doctrines which are here set forth in parable cannot ever recommend themselves to any beyond the few persons who care to blend with poetic enjoyment somewhat of the 'intellectual gymnastics' involved in all metaphysics. Even to the exceptionally thoughtful nowadays, metaphysical thought, at its simplest, is not greatly acceptable; and this because intellectual man is fast passing *en masse* from the metaphysical to the positive sphere of thought. Yet one may agree perfectly with Mr. Scott, that the subject of his philosophic poem, 'the descent of the soul from a simple and unconscious state into the antagonistic and concrete, and its reascent—or the readjustment of the human with the divine nature, ... is less a subject for the analytic than the imaginative faculty.' Nor is it possible that an imaginative faculty such as Mr. Scott's should be exercised on such a subject without striking out in its path numerous fine trains of thought, and leaving the burning mark of poetry on many a noble sentiment. Add to this, that the scheme of *The Year of the World* is one of the largest and most daring ideas that a poet ever undertook; for the book sets forth in parable no less a matter than the progress of the human soul, and is vitalised by an ardent faith in the perfectibility of man's nature. But while this subject is treated with great power and much beauty of

ornament, there are certain matters connected with the poet's philosophic stand-point, which, being purely matters of individual conviction, do not necessarily fit in with one's view of things, however warmly one may admire the poem: thus, when Mr. Scott says that the readjustment of the human with the divine nature 'is the profound idea of all religions and philosophy,' I take leave to dissent altogether from him; because it is now well known that at least one religion has been constructed and pretty considerably preached without the assumption of any divine nature to adjust human nature to, and because the idea in question, doubtless fundamental in most bygone religions, belongs rather to the emotional nature than to the intellectual nature, and must be totally disconnected from any philosophic synthesis ignoring all forms of theology. Philosophy, as conceived nowadays, requires the support of science; and all that is unscientific, or even non-scientific, is fast passing out of the category of ideas held to be philosophic. What is too subtle and mystical to be apprehended by any faculty but the imagination, passes out of the intelligence, and is only guarded in the heart by an appeal of great force and fervour, or by what is more powerful than that, the weight of custom. There is in *The Year of the World* much fine thought that is too subtle for easy apprehension by the purely logical faculty, and which cer-

tainly has not custom to fight on its side; so that, with all its beauties and notwithstanding the clear severity of its style, the pith and essence of the conception would be almost sure to elude the receptive faculties of the average brain, unless the poem chanced to strike upon the emotional nature with great fervour.

The delight of transit from the subtle and mystic to spheres of clear and lucid thought, apprehensible without difficulty, and without offence to the exacting sense of the real, may be experienced in passing from the attempt to apprehend, fully and feelingly, *The Year of the World*, and plunging at random into *Poems by a Painter*. Nor does Mr. Scott in any sense sacrifice loftiness of tone to reality when he comes down from the treatment of such an ambitious scheme as that just glanced at: rather do his meditations take an added loftiness from greater accessibleness, as for instance in the grand poem called *Death*, and in the exquisite little idyll *Green Cherries*,—one of several studies from nature in blank verse, showing what fine and delicate workmanship Mr. Scott can clothe his thoughts in when he pleases. For a poem whereof the central thought is that

‘we retain
Deepest impressions from most trivial things;
They are the daily food God serves us with—’

nothing could be more profoundly appropriate than the cunning finish and dextrous simplicity of the following piece of open-air work:

'All over bench and table, ground and sward,
The young green cherries lay, yet overhead
Glittering like beads they still seemed thick as leaves
Upon the boughs. And young green apples too
Scattered by prodigal winds peeped here and there,
Among the clover. Through the black boughs shone
Clouds of a white heat, in the cold blue depths
Poised steadily, and all about them rang
Those songs of skylarks. Other sounds were there;
The click mistimed of hedge-shears; the brave bee
Passing with trumpet gladness; and the leaves
Hushing against each other. Soon this way
Along the further hedge-tops came the shears;
Two wielding arms assiduous and a face,
The prickly screen disclosed. Far down the line
By slow degrees went shears and arms, while I
Marked the still toppling twigs, until at length
They passed beyond the fruit-trees, and I turned
To other themes.'

In such poems as this, *The Artist's Birthplace*, and some others, one recognises Mr. Scott's sympathy with the growing Preraphaelite movement which shared his long-cherished aim of close adherence to nature and total rupture with conventionality, and which at the same time, whether consciously and intentionally or not, erected fresh and anti-conventional standards of beauty. As Mr. Rossetti's earliest poems clearly show, no idea could be further from the Preraphaelite conception of returning to nature than any idea involving the sacrifice of beauty; and it is only in those disciples less sumptuously endowed than he that one finds beauty gravely sacrificed at times to naturalism: nothing could be more sane than the Preraphaelite ideal; but all who held it were not equally gifted with those powers and perceptions requisite for keep-

ing within the sacred bounds of beauty the embodiments of any ideal whatever. Mr. Scott, in throwing the weight of his genius into the movement, had something to gain as well as something to yield. Senior to any man concerned in the movement, he no doubt yielded to some of the men who have brought about such splendid results somewhat of the sober ballast of a mental equipage more grave than is compatible with the vital fervour of a youthful esthetic propagand, while he seems to have drawn from contact with some of these fervent young artists a more exacting sense of propriety in diction.

The faculty of giving a modern piquancy of flavour to thoughts or themes or situations in reality archaic is largely associated with all our Preraphaelite art; and this fact is significant because it implies that, after all, nature and reality are ever shifting criteria, and are conceived of very much according to the tastes of the artists who may please to plead them in explanation of forms adopted. The very poets who have cried out for more nature and actuality have been the foremost to enter into a fruitful sympathetic alliance with those medieval artists who deviated as far from actuality as Raphael and his school did, *only in an opposite direction*. Fra Angelico and Sandro Botticelli and Benozzo Gozzoli, and many more early Italian artists, are living influences traceable this day in much that is produced by the Pre-

raphaelite artists, whether with pen or with pencil ; and yet it is very doubtful whether, the elements of reality being gathered in first from these noble old artists and then from Raphael and his school, and set in opposite scales, the scale of the former would not kick the beam. Still the sympathy in question is indubitably healthy and beneficial to modern art, because of the harmful conventionalities which have been handed on and on by meagre followers of the tradition of Raphael to followers more meagre still, until the imitators of imitators have brought to pass, from generation to generation, what can only be traced to the original source through the exercise of the 'purely imaginative faculty.' It is this degeneration from a noble original that has turned the highest artist-souls of this day towards those old artists of pure sentiment and exquisite child-simplicity and keen love of a nature that they knew but little by scientific processes of mind, yet had so wholly by heart ; and it is through a deep correlation of two arts that we also find a strong early Italian infusion in the Preraphaelite order of poetry with its independent off-shoots, and find the old ballad style of poetry brought into use again, endowed with a richness and subtlety for which the accumulated result of centuries of thought and feeling is to thank. The contemporary ballad poetry, which finds its highest level in Mr. Rossetti's *Sister Helen*, is also

indebted to Mr. Scott for some fine samples. *Saint Margaret* is a specimen of noble intensity in this manner; and *A Bridal Race* is sprightly and delicious. But the two finest of Mr. Scott's published ballad poems are *Woodstock Maze* and *Four Acts of Saint Cuthbert*. The brief history of the unfortunate Rosamond is very freshly handled in the first-named, in which simplicity and subtlety are admirably blended: the playful joy of expectancy is grandly contrasted at the close with the grimly tragic:

'The golden evening burns right through
My dark chamber windows twain:
I listen, all round me is only a grave,
Yet listen I ever again.
Will he come? I pluck the flower-leaves off,
And at each, cry, yes, no, yes,
I blow the down from the dry hawkweed,
Once, twice, hah! it flies amiss!
O the shower and the sunshine every day
Pass and pass, be ye sad, be ye gay.

Hark! he comes! Yet his footstep sounds
As it sounded never before!
Perhaps he thinks to steal on me,
But I'll hide behind the door.
She ran, she stopped, stood still as stone—
It was Queen Eleanore,—
And at once she felt what sudden death
The hungering she-wolf bore!
O the leaves, brown, yellow, and red, still fall
Fall and fall over churchyard and hall!

The two closing couplets of these two stanzas are used as alternating burdens throughout this poem, and with excellent effect.

But excellent as are this poem and some others

of a like nature, it is in those pieces of a more purely meditative order that the poet attains his greatest aptness of expression. Never *coldly* meditative, he is yet quite free from all unseemly disturbances that arise, to the detriment of poetry, from any rankness of passion; and he has the happy faculty of mixing profound sympathy into his most thoughtful veins of work. As a sample of weighty thought, supporting what has been said of Mr. Scott's healthful effrontery in regard to Death, I can do no better than quote a poem embodying a snatch of poetic philosophy which it would be well for every man to get by heart. The poem is that entitled *Death*, named already; and I give it entire:

'I am the one whose thought
Is as the deed; I have no brother, and
No father: years
Have never seen my power begin. A chain
Doth bind all things to me. In my hand, man,—
Infinite thinker,—vanishes as doth
The worm that he creates, as doth the moth
That it creates, as doth the limb minute
That stirs upon that moth. My being is
Inborn with all things, and
With all things doth expand.

But fear me not; I am
The hoary dust, the shut ear, the profound,
The deep of night,
When Nature's universal heart doth cease
To beat; communicating nothing; dark
And tongueless, negative of all things. Yet
Fear me not, man; I am the blood that flows
Within thee,—I am change; and it is I
Creates a joy within thee, when thou feel'st
Manhood and new untried superior powers

Rising before thee : I it is can make
 Old things give place
 To thy free race.

All things are born for me.
 His father and his mother,—yet man hates
 Me foolishly.

An easy spirit and a free lives on ;
 But he who fears the ice doth stumble. Walk
 Straight onward peacefully,—I am a friend
 Will pass thee graciously : but grudge and weep
 And cark,—I'll be a cold chain round thy neck
 Into the grave, each day a link drawn in,
 Until thy face shall be upon the turf,
 And the hair from thy crown
 Be blown like thistle-down.'

There is a largeness here not often noticeable in contemporary verse, and a form that is at once without finish and beyond the need of finish : the absolute scientific truth and philosophic insight of the second verse is comparable with the higher flights of Walt Whitman ; and the summarised symbol-pictures of death the enemy and death the friend in the last verse seem to me to reach sublimity. But the most remarkable thing about this poem is the general likeness it has to Walt Whitman's poetry in magnificence of thought and masterly freedom of form : this is the more remarkable because the poem was first published in 1835,—twenty years before Walt Whitman issued his *Leaves of Grass*. It is a fact worthy of record that the only poet among us who has anything in common with the great American is one whose works are best classed among the highly cultivated results of the Preraphaelite movement.

Whitman's 'return to nature' has been far more decided and marked than any return that has ever yet been made in art: he 'strikes up for a new world' in the most absolute sense, ignoring all that we have been in the habit of recognising as appurtenances to the art of song; while the Præraphærites, getting their best strength from movements in the same direction, yet retain so much of the hereditary artificial elements of European poetry as are indispensable under our definitely European conceptions of song. Even Mr. Scott, dispensing with much that usually goes to make a lyric beautiful, would not give up in this poem *Death* the three little final rhymed couplets; and let it be fairly confessed that he did well to keep them.

There is something of the same large freedom in another beautiful early poem of Mr. Scott's,—*Maryanne*, a very sad poem tracing a village maiden's life from the age of eight, through the gradual contamination of city life to the terrible end, when, 'age unknown,' we see her sliding grimly out of the world as tenant of a hospital-pallet. Full of delicate transits as is the narration, and relieved as it is by sweet lyric notes at fitting times, there is something extremely solemn and pathetic in the setting forth of the inevitable end:

'A white-washed chamber wide and long,
With unscreened pallets placed in rows,

Each tenanted by pain.
 In the first a grey-haired woman, tho'
 Still almost youthful: in the next
 A girl with yellow teeth and eyes,
 And lips as blue as heaven!
 One form is there we have marked before,
 Whose merriment we have heard. *My God!*
 And yet perhaps 'tis her best bourne:
 She shall not live to fight with dogs
 For bones on the nightly causeway,
 Or gather ashes thrifty wives
 May fling from their hearthstones.
 She may die! the board is sawn
 And blackened, and the turf
 Is soon rent up to lay her down:
 While forms as fair, as gleesome hearts,
 As blindly shall succeed her,—place
 Their feet where she hath trod,—amid
 Like laughter shut their eyes,—and then
 Fill this her mattress, thus, with shaven crowns.

And fathers still will shake their heads;
 And youths who have not souls, have beards;
 And scribes and pharisees cross the way;
 And country queans at harvest-home
 Blush if they do not dance in silk;
 And every lamp on every street
 Light them like Maryanne.'

And one cannot too much admire the artistic cunning with which this sombre catastrophe is developed from the finely foreshadowed weakness of Maryanne's character: in the first section (*Age—Eight Years*) we see her going to church with her mother, as a simple, impressible, little maiden, whose attention when she gets to church is mainly occupied by an examination of 'the laird.'

There is one poem in Mr. Scott's collection, written in the manner of the blank-verse nature-

studies, but which is in some respects finer than any of those even,—*The Duke's Funeral*. It is a piece wherein many of the best qualities of modern poetry are blended and concentrated in an extraordinary degree; and I know no poem of like size and of the present period that is more absolute in its excellence, more complete and self-sufficient than this. It gives in a few lines what will no doubt be the verdict of posterity on the character and doings of that brilliant Duke of Wellington so long the most worshipped of all the Penates of the British Philistine; appraises his limited nature at its real value, to a hair; appraises his noisy achievements also at their historic value, and no jot more; and flings out into the most burning significance that dire fact that the man whose mission it had been to crush one Napoleon for the restoration of 'Right Divine,' passed in pomp to his tomb while another Napoleon stood triumphant over 'Right Divine' prostrated again:

'Europe is saved again! France saved again!
A new Napoleon its last saviour, sweeps
These old things out like cobwebs, sabreing both
Legitimist and red republican.
So wags the world; so history fills her page!
And he who with this mighty pomp beneath
A nation's eyes goes tombward, leaves no mark!'

As a poem dealing severely with a question of wide contemporary interest this is unequalled in the largeness of its spirit. It is amply bitter for the occasion—terrible in its severity—and the more so in that the

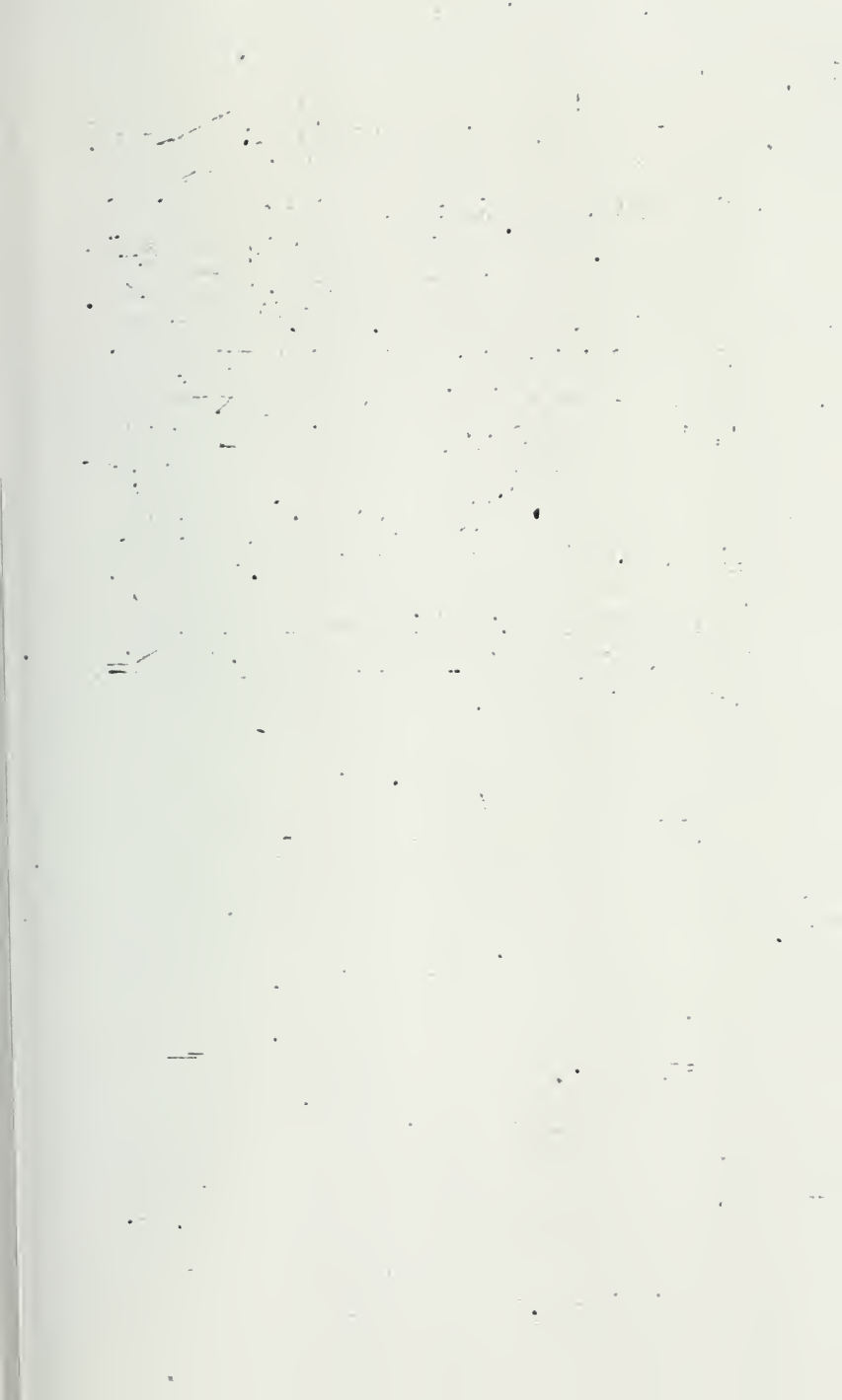
artist shows that perfect strength of hand that alone can keep poetry of this order from losing force through excess of fury; and the sweeping breadth of vision employed in drawing in just the right and sufficient materials to fill out the well compacted fabric is noteworthy in a high degree.

In all that Mr. Scott does, affecting the larger questions of man's nature and destinies—and a great proportion of his work does affect those larger questions—he shows himself a true and ardent soldier in the cause of human progress and light and enfranchisement in all senses. The various notes struck from his many-stringed lyre all hold as central in their tones a clearly human cry, and even when depth of thought leads the poet into obscurities, it is easy to see that he is not in dreamland, but in a sphere of *clearly human* meditation. Whether he be singing in those large free cadences that we have seen in such poems as *Death* and *Maryanne*, or submitting to the straiter bondage (which is still 'perfect freedom') of form more conventionally lyric, there is the same liberty and depth of thought; and even in that most artificial of forms, the sonnet, he does not lose his enfranchisement, as we may see in the remarkable *Ten Sonnets embodying Religious Ideas*. Some of these are very lovely; and be it noted the 'religious ideas' are always, as in other cases, embodied with peculiar regard to their vital human aspect. Some of

them are among the most perfect sonnets in the English language,—as indeed are some of the miscellaneous sonnets that precede them.

That Mr. Scott had not, up to the year 1868, abandoned the exercise of this noblest of the pursuits wherein he has achieved so much, he gave us a proof in the poem *Anthony* published in the *Fortnightly Review*.* That poem, exceedingly interesting in itself, succeeds worthily to what has issued from the same hand before, and serves to stimulate the wish that we may ere long see the whole collection, in some suitable form, put within reach of a public for whom good poetry is a matter of yearly increasing value and importance.

* For July 1868.



XII.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

'Something too much of Æsculapius in him, something too little of Apollo his father.'—A. C. SWINBURNE.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

LOOKED at either as poet or as essayist Mr. Matthew Arnold is perhaps more manifestly the vehicle of ideas than any English writer of the day. Probably no one feels quite as he does the great value of ideas considered without reference to any possibilities of reducing them to practice. To the essayist there is far more advantage than disadvantage in this state of things; because in an age and country with so strong a tendency to gross utilitarianism as this country and age show, a man who gives full force to the cultivation and exposition of ideas holds a place of marked superiority. But to the poet a too great fondness for mere ideas is apt to bring a too great readiness to accept forms of expression far worse than the best, simply for the sake of some cherished ideas set forth. And this cannot but result in frequent coldness and lack of sympathy:—whereas the very life and soul of poetry is that it should have been felt in the artist's heart before coming to his intellect for shaping and finishing.

Mr. Arnold's best essays are undoubted masterpieces; and yet in reading them it is not easy to get

over the idea that one is conversing rather with an *intelligence* than with a wide-hearted living man. There is much retention of enthusiasm, and so great a measure of delicate intellectual subtlety, that the atmosphere is generally more or less uncongenial; even while no sane person can fail to recognise in every essay large gain to the realm of letters. But in regard to the poems no general statement such as this can be made; because, while some of the more intellectual pieces seem to be outside the domain of poetry proper, some of the more heart-felt and imaginative poems are nearly as beautiful as they can be.

Sharing with the Preraphaelite order of poets the practice of Wordsworthian naturalism, Mr. Arnold also shares with Wordsworth such repute as a poet may get from dry sententiousness; while, in place of the medievalism that lends so much beauty to Preraphaelite poetry, he has taken to himself classic stock, and has thus earned for much of his work a high place in the Neo-Greek division of *renaissance* poetry. But to say that he is *narrowly* neo-classic would be false; for, while he has produced no poems more replete with the higher elements of poetry than many inspired by Greek themes and wrought more or less after Greek models, he has yet given us some gems that are beautiful among the most beautiful poetry of our day, and which have been caught

up by his imagination in searching the great store-houses of Scandinavian and Asiatic myth and legend.

I must not let myself be tempted into making here any lengthy study of Mr. Arnold's prose works; nor is it easy to give in a few words a general description of them; but I believe I may say with truth and without offence that his essays constitute, more than any English works of the day, a *gospel of ideas* as opposed to the many gospels of practice. Indeed he has been at so much pains to show the function of criticism to be entirely an intellectual function, that one must expect more thoughtfulness than sympathy from him. His lucid and refined thoughts on criticism itself are of the greatest value,—his thoughts on all subjects he touches are of great value, because they suggest in the most pointed manner even when they convey no conviction of truth or convey a strong conviction of error; and yet I am bold to say that this scornful assailant of British 'Philistinism' is nearly as much the slave of fine ethereal ideas as the average Briton is the slave of grossly practical ones. Note too that the predominant ideas in Mr. Arnold's essays are often mistaken ones to start with, and that, while he is working out his theme with that perfect clearness and niceness of his so good for all essayists to emulate, he is yet often, in his own urbane way, doing very 'provincial' violence to the idea in hand by forcing it to include

things that will not properly come within it. For instance, he preaches the gospel of politeness to the top of his bent: in his polemics he is exceedingly polite, refined, urbane (to use his own pet word). He condemns the brutal tone of our press invective, but merely because it is not polite, refined, urbane,—not because it wounds people's susceptibilities, and he would accuse one of being vulgarly practical if one asked what is the great matter whether an unkind thing be said brutally or with the more refined devilishness of 'urbane' sarcasm? Perhaps the urbane sarcasm hurts more than the brutal insult:—most likely it does. Why then should we try to disseminate urbane sarcasm at all? Does Mr. Arnold really think he does humanity a good service when he not only preaches, but practises also, urbane invective? I can conceive that Mr. Wright, if he be at all open to painful impressions from things said of him in print, would not enjoy the implications of a certain sentence of Mr. Arnold's in a certain squabble about translating Homer. Noticing that Mr. Wright dates from Mapperly, Mr. Arnold says he should so much like to ask him whether he knows what became of that poor girl Wragg—referring to a girl who murdered her illegitimate child on Mapperly Hills, and furnished Mr. Arnold with a fine illustration for some remarks made on another subject. Now it is very likely that if Mr. Wright had had his choice

he would much rather have been called a fool by the *Saturday Review* than mentioned by Mr. Arnold in the manner referred to above ; and while Mr. Arnold regards the *Saturday Review* as guilty of brutality in calling some one a fool—calls that respectable journal a brute in point of fact—he is complacent enough in the delivery of such urbanities as that just noted. If he would advocate the abolition of literary squabbling, and set a new dignified fashion by disseminating his vigorous yet chaste ideas consistently, calmly, without regarding or answering what he might justly call coarse attacks, then one could find no great fault with his manner, and the ideas might be taken simply on their own merits. But when this idea of urbanity is treated as having reference to style alone, and is regarded as by no means incompetent to include hard sayings, deliberately framed to hurt people, then it seems to me that Mr. Arnold is carried away by an idea—not calmly disseminating an idea. For under the polished surface of Mr. Arnold's sarcastic allusions and significant ironical humility it is impossible not to discern rancour and egotism and vanity such as are quite as foreign to the true spirit of urbanity as is the tone he condemns in less polite injuries.

It is very easy in writing on urbanity versus provinciality to take up all kinds of faults, and stigmatise them as provincial. But can any good reason be given

for regarding the very grave offence of egotism as an urbane rather than a provincial sin. Do we not get the 'note of provinciality' here?—'I have been taken to task by the *Daily Telegraph*, coupled, by a strange perversity of fate, with just that very one of the Hebrew prophets whose style I admire the least, and called an elegant Jeremiah.' Now, if it were really important what the *Daily Telegraph* called Mr. Arnold, and whether Mr. Arnold admired Jeremiah a little more or a little less than other Hebrew prophets, this would not be offensively egotistical. But those are purely personal matters, and it is not reasonable to expect that the Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, or any other editor, should discriminate nicely between those Jewish prophets whose style is admired by Mr. Arnold and those whose style is not; because, unless it were introduced incidentally into some valuable piece of criticism, the question whether Mr. Arnold admires the style of Jeremiah more or less than that of the other prophets is not really of much more importance to the British public than it is to poor dear Jeremiah himself. And it is no uncommon thing for Mr. Arnold to bring in his own personality, as it were by the head and shoulders, in this truly provincial manner. What has been said here has reference exclusively to taste; but that the 'note of provinciality' in matters of intelligence exists abundantly enough in Mr. Arnold's writings has been pointed

out by one of his greatest admirers, Mr. Swinburne, who seems to me to support his position well.*

But it is time to pass to the poetical works; and first of all let us look at *Merope*, the largest of them. The prefatory essay to this tragedy is itself one of the best of Mr. Arnold's smaller essays, and gives a very interesting account of the materials of the play, and the treatments those materials have already undergone. But here again one is detained to wonder at the extreme affectation of this greatly intelligent writer. The end of the essay, characteristic of Mr. Arnold to a high degree, is quite a little masterpiece of affected urbanity. It runs thus: 'How much do I regret that the many poets of the present day who possess that capacity which I have not, should not have forestalled me in an endeavour far beyond my powers! . . . Only their silence could have emboldened to undertake it one with inadequate time, inadequate knowledge, and a talent, alas! still more inadequate: one who brings to the task none of the requisite qualifications of genius or learning: nothing but a passion for the great Masters, and an effort to study them without fancifulness.'

What convinces one of the extreme affectation of this is the obviousness of the two questions, why publish the poem, and with a considerable prefatory flourish of trumpets, if you do not think you have

* See *Fortnightly Review*, October 1867.

a capacity for that kind of work? And if you do, why depreciate your tragedy? In fact, *Merope* is a success on the whole, and needs no apology. The subject is not as happy as that of Mr. Swinburne's *Atalanta*; but for intelligent use of the Greek form in its larger outlines, Mr. Arnold's work is perfect. The sentiment and characters too are wrought out with a measure of unmistakably modern thought, sufficient to give vivid life to a poem in a revived form. Also the author has managed to present in an intelligent and powerful manner much of the supreme Caucasian subtlety that found its highest expression among the Greeks. Perhaps the most telling and genuine piece of poetry in the work is that splendid tale told by Æpytus, when he comes to kill the murderer-uncle, who has deprived him of both father and inheritance. With what a Greek perfection of self-reliance the youth accosts his dangerous intended victim, and with what a grand presence of mind he gives glibly and graphically the account of his own death, which he invents in assuming the character of chosen companion of his late self! Look at this, the most important part of his speech, relating to the hunt in which he pretends himself killed:

'At last the cry drew to the water's edge—
And through the brushwood, to the pebbly strand,
Broke, black with sweat, the antler'd mountain stag,
And took the lake: two hounds alone pursued;

Then came the prince—he shouted and plung'd in.—
 There is a chasm rifted in the base
 Of that unfooted precipice, whose rock
 Walls on one side the deep Stympthalian Lake :
 There the lake-waters, which in ages gone
 Wash'd, as the marks upon the hills still show,
 All the Stympthalian plain, are now suck'd down.
 A headland, with one aged plane-tree crown'd,
 Parts from the cave-pierc'd cliff the shelving bay
 Where first the chase plung'd in : the bay is smooth,
 But round the headland's point a current sets,
 Strong, black, tempestuous, to the cavern-mouth.
 Stoutly, under the headland's lee, they swam :
 But when they came abreast the point, the race
 Caught them, as wind takes feathers, whirl'd them round
 Struggling in vain to cross it, swept them on,
 Stag, dogs, and hunter, to the yawning gulph.
 All this, O King, not piecemeal, as to thee
 Now told, but in one flashing instant pass'd :
 While from the turf whereon I lay I sprang,
 And took three strides, quarry and dogs were gone ;
 A moment more—I saw the prince turn round
 Once in the black and arrowy race, and cast
 One arm aloft for help ; then sweep beneath
 The low-brow'd cavern-arch, and disappear.'

One hardly knows whether to admire more the lively
 and sympathetic intimacy shown with the features of
 the scenery and the incidents of active life in the
 open air, or the complete Odyssean mastery of him-
 self, enabling the youth to tell this crafty tale with
 so much earnestness and reality. It will be seen too
 that this fragment, regarded with an eye for style,
 merits eminently that refined title 'Attic' by which
 this poet, as critic, sets so much store ; and not only
 the whole speech, but the whole work, is conspicuous
 for its Attic purity of style, its perfect freedom from
 aught that is heavy and gorgeous and involved. In-

deed one is almost led to overlook the very important lack of lyric beauty in the play, for the sake of this grateful Attic quality of style—grateful in so large a measure to those who have suffered much from the many cumbrous, interminable, gorgeously picturesque similes which afflict the artistic sense in some of Mr. Arnold's best poems, and which he might in some cases defend as fitly Asiatic. But after all, how is it possible to overlook in a Neo-Greek tragedy the absence of the true lyric note? How, with all their purity of language, can one pardon Mr. Arnold for giving us no better choruses than those sung by Messenian maidens in *Merope*? It is hard to believe at all in unrhymed choruses being sufficiently musical for the requirements of a Neo-Greek play in English; and these choruses of *Merope* do not sing in one's ears:—how should they, formed in this fashion?—

‘ Did I then waver
 (O woman's judgment!)
 Misled by seeming
 Success of crime?
 And ask, if sometimes
 The Gods, perhaps, allow'd you,
 O lawless daring of the strong,
 O self-will recklessly indulg'd?’

Where would be the ‘forlorn music’ of *Atalanta* if Mr. Swinburne, who can make even a prose paragraph sing, had written the choruses on the model of this strophe instead of in his own superb manner?

It must be admitted that some of the choric portions have a rhythmic cadence entirely wanting in the above; but none of them come up to the author's beautiful 'fragment of chorus' of a *Dejaneira*, opening—

'O frivolous mind of man,
Light ignorance, and hurrying, unsure thoughts,
Though man bewails you not,
How I bewail you !'

And even this is unmusical compared with the lovely songs of Callicles in *Empedocles on Etna*. It is an undoubted fact that Mr. Arnold can produce very exquisite lyric work; and that he could find a sweet lyric vein in treating the sombre subject of the death of Empedocles, with a severity too that almost oppresses us with its terrible fitness at times, is significant of what he might have done in such a drama as *Merope*. Who that has once read *Empedocles* can forget the voice of Callicles, 'from below,' sending up its divine calm music at that moment when the goaded philosopher has forever assuaged his spirit by a plunge into the crater? After the fervid final 'Receive me! Save me!' with what a grateful peacefulness comes the harp-player's

'Not here, O Apollo!
Are haunts meet for thee.
But, where Helicon breaks down
In cliff to the sea,'—

and it is not easy to find verse more satisfyingly musical, and at the same time more free from effort or

redundancy of line, than those three verses near the close,—

'Tis Apollo comes leading
His choir, the Nine.
—The leader is fairest,
But all are divine.

They are lost in the hollows!
They stream up again!
What seeks on this mountain
The glorified train?—

They bathe on this mountain,
In the spring by their road;
Then on to Olympus,
Their endless abode!

That this is not choric verse makes no difference whatever in our grudge against the poet: if he can make his Callicles sing such songs, he could make his Messenian maidens intone their choruses just as musically; and one must of course put down the lack of choric propriety in *Merope* to the author's besetting fault,—the letting himself become the slave of an idea. It was not simply that he had certain doctrinal ideas to embody in his choruses; but he had fully taken in with his fine intelligence the large beauty of Greek tragic form; and nothing would satisfy him but to adopt the form with a preciseness our language will not bear. And although these choruses show by their want of spontaneity that they have been bred intellectually, not felt, he yet shows himself so far enslaved by his idea as to point out their originality! How, without sacrificing the es-

sence of the Greek tragedy, a work of perfect music could be produced, has been seen in *Atalanta*. The great difference between that work and *Merope* seems to be that while Mr. Arnold never let himself be carried off by his subject into a single heart-felt moment's oblivion of the models his intelligence accepted, Mr. Swinburne, having taken in no less fully and carefully these same models, and having, it would seem, felt more of the innermost meaning of them, gave out his lovely drama with all the air of a natural growth from his own soul and language; and as the most perfect music reached the Greek poet without rhymes, so the most perfect music has reached the English poet with them,—as it always will. It may be said that the younger poet is far more a slave to passion and feeling than the elder is to ideas; but that is not the present question: the important point here is that what value Mr. Swinburne adds to his *Atalanta* by the inestimable quality of spontaneity, Mr. Arnold fails to add to his *Merope*, because his artistic *sense* is so straitly controlled by a fastidious intelligence; and the same lack of spontaneity shown in the unmusical choruses of *Merope* avails to mar more or less some of the most beautiful of his poems.

It is not always clear to *what* idea such and such a seeming affectation is attributable; but that the flaws of his poetry arise from the uncompromising service of ideas no one who knows his prose can

doubt. It is not very clear, for instance, why simile is employed in these refined pages in what cannot but be called a cumbrous manner. The figures are usually excellent intrinsically,—always vividly picturesque; but even in *Balder Dead*, which gives us under the modest title of ‘an episode’ the most beautiful of the Northern myths to be found in Snorri’s Edda, the strength of the Northern sentiment and the frankness of the Northern atmosphere seem impaired by an over-laborious rhetoric. Surely a comparison, to be thoroughly effective, should be direct and condensed; but with Mr. Arnold a long passage, entering into all sorts of details of the objects used for comparison, is frequently interpolated between two portions of the thing predicated concerning the actual subject of discourse. For instance, when the god Hermod has to cross the bridge over ‘Giall’s stream,’ to beg his brother Balder back from hell, the damsel keeping the bridge is introduced thus :

‘Scant space that Warder left for passers by;
But, as when cowherds in October drive
Their kine across a snowy mountain pass
To winter pasture on the southern side,
And on the ridge a waggon chokes the way
Wedg’d in the snow; then painfully the hinds
With goad and shouting urge their cattle past,
Plunging through deep untrodden banks of snow
To right and left, and warm steam fills the air—
So on the bridge that Damsel block’d the way,
And question’d Hermod as he came.’

The comparison of a damsel to a waggon is not spe-

cially poetical; and the details of drovers and cattle are ineffective and irrelevant. There could be no artistic object in setting a herd of oxen to stand as the type of Hermod, the swift and nimble god of the northern mythology; and, had there been, the details which swell up the eight lines of the simile would not have been well placed. This simile of cattle and drovers suggests a passage of the Laureate's in *Aylmer's Field*, in which a good effect is given by an analogous comparison. When the miserable squire has been smitten by the sermon preached at him, and is following his fainting wife out of church, we are told in short direct phrase that he

‘follow'd out

Tall and erect, but in the middle aisle
Reel'd, as a footsore ox in crowded ways
Stumbling across the market to his death,
Unpitied; for he groped as blind, and seem'd
Always about to fall, grasping the pews.’

There the simile is in proper subordination to the incidents simlised; and we do not for an instant lose sight of the man, while holding in our minds the touching association suggested in simile. But in the other complex figure of speech we have to go back and forward to satisfy ourselves who is to stand for the waggon and who for the cattle, and to seek inscrutable reasons for such and such small detail. There are several instances of this in the same noble poem of *Balder Dead*. Another example occurs in

the passage where Hermod and Niord visit the cavern of Thok, to beg her tears for Balder, the only condition of whose release from hell is that everything weep for him: the simile here, though very beautiful in itself, is spun out wearisomely. But for the most extraordinary feat in hopelessly extended simile we must seek in *Sohrab and Rustum*, the most genuine and beautiful of Mr. Matthew Arnold's longer poems. In it the treatment and materials seem when looked at all together as well fitted to each other as they are valuable individually. How clear the poet makes the arid landscape of his piece, with what a solicitous interest he keeps his readers hanging on the event of the combat, with what a pathos almost sublime he ends, all must well remember who have once seen the poem. But when the bold and courteous young Sohrab has fought with his father unknowing and unknown, the mighty Rustum being the one champion the Persians can find to match against Sohrab the champion of the Tartars—when the youth, after a life of longing to meet his great father Rustum, lies dying by that very father's hand, the solemnity of the situation is surely not heightened by the introduction of such a paragraph as the following:

'As when some hunter in the spring hath found
A breeding eagle sitting on her nest,
Upon the craggy isle of a hill lake,
And pierc'd her with an arrow as she rose,

And follow'd her to find her when she fell
 Far off;—anon her mate comes winging back
 From hunting, and a great way off describes
 His huddling young left sole; at that, he checks
 His pinion, and with short uneasy sweeps
 Circles above his eyry, with loud screams
 Chiding his mate back to her nest; but she
 Lies dying, with the arrow in her side,
 In some far stony gorge out of his ken,
 A heap of fluttering feathers: never more
 Shall the lake glass her, flying over it;
 Never the black and dripping precipices
 Echo her stormy scream as she sails by:—
 As that poor bird flies home, nor knows his loss—
 So Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood
 Over his dying son, and knew him not.'

As a picture of bird-life this is all very pretty indeed, but between the situation of Rustum and Sohrab and that of the two eagles there is no point of analogy in the lengthy episode except that Rustum and the male eagle are unaware of their respective misfortunes. Into what an insignificant artificiality does this shrink when we turn half a dozen pages and witness the profoundly moving and solemn spectacle of the mighty Rustum convicted of sonslaughter by the mark on Sohrab's arm, and struck into a frantic grief that at once reveals him to his son, who has had a strong feeling towards his great adversary all through the combat. 'How say'st thou?' asks the youth,—

' "Is that sign the proper sign
 Of Rustum's son, or of some other man's?"
 He spoke: but Rustum gaz'd, and gaz'd, and stood
 Speechless; and then he utter'd one sharp cry—

*O Boy—thy Father!—and his voice chok'd there.
And then a dark cloud pass'd before his eyes,
And his head swam, and he sank down to earth.
But Sohrab crawl'd to where he lay, and cast
His arms about his neck, and kiss'd his lips,
And with fond faltering fingers strok'd his cheeks,
Trying to call him back to life. . .'*

It is refreshing to see Mr. Arnold lose for once, as here, his imperious intellectuality, and give way to an utterance supremely felt as this must have been; and I know scarcely anything in modern poetry more intense than the anguish of the father and the exquisite sonship of the youth. How beautifully he consoles as far as may be the awestruck champion, preventing his attempted suicide, and sending him to await his fate, and how at length he draws out his father's spear and lets his life ebb from him, are matters told so as to form no anticlimax to the central situation; and, happiest circumstance of all, there is a most solemn and appropriate close:

*'So, on the bloody sand, Sohrab lay dead.
And the great Rustum drew his horseman's cloak
Down o'er his face, and sate by his dead son.
As those black granite pillars, once high-rear'd
By Jemshid in Persepolis, to bear
His house, now, mid their broken flights of steps,
Lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side—
So in the sand lay Rustum by his son.*

*And night came down over the solemn waste,
And the two gazing hosts, and that sole pair,
And darken'd all; and a cold fog, with night,
Crept from the Oxus. Soon a hum arose,
As of a great assembly loos'd, and fires
Began to twinkle through the fog: for now*

Both armies mov'd to camp, and took their meal :
The Persians took it on the open sands
Southward ; the Tartars by the river marge :
And Rustum and his son were left alone.

But the majestic river floated on,
Out of the mist and hum of that low land,
Into the frosty starlight, and there mov'd,
Rejoicing, though the hush'd Chorasman waste,
Under the solitary moon : he flow'd
Right for the Polar Star, past Orgunjé,
Brimming, and bright, and large : then sands begin
To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,
And split his currents ; that for many a league
The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strains along
Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles—
Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had
In his high mountain cradle in Pamere,
A foil'd circuitous wanderer :—till at last
The long'd-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
His luminous home of waters opens, bright
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bath'd stars
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.'

Note this time the perfect fitness of the brief simile of the prostrate granite house-pillars, so appropriate as types of the two fallen pillars of the house of Rustum : note the impressive descent of night as the proper garment for those who had fought so disastrously ; and note chiefly the symbolic final picture of the flowing Oxus—picture worthy of Turner for its beauty as a landscape with a subtle spiritual application to human life. The grand unconscious flow of the river serves well its twofold purpose of expressing the divine impartiality of the earth and inanimate things in the presence of slain and slayer, and imaging the 'shorn and parcell'd' life of the

man whose great deeds have led him at last to kill his only son : Rustum, too, a ' foil'd circuitous wanderer,' has his sole hope in the dark waters of that sea into which the pale stars silently watch us all !

One favourite idea of Mr. Arnold's has not led him into anything of verse-work that we can regret—the idea, namely, that we are before all things bound to watch for what is good in foreign^o thought and be never weary of disseminating it. We have from him a considerable range of poems based on foreign thoughts inasmuch as the situations are abroad,—thus importing new elements into our literature; and whatever we may hold concerning those excellent essays wherein he advances so exaggerated an estimate of Maurice and Eugénie de Guérin, whatever we may think with him or against him as to the influence of academies on the world of letters, as to the study of Celtic literature, and as to this, that, and the other thing, we cannot but deem it an unmixed good that he has gone abroad for such subjects as those of *Balder Dead*, *Sohrab and Rustum*, and many others which there is no need even to specify.

Of one ' foreign' poem I cannot deny myself the gratification of a few closing words. *The Church of Brou*, as far as the ballad narrative of the first section is concerned, is not very remarkable; nor is the second section, called *The Church*; but in the short final section, *The Tomb*, the poet is seen at his very

best. I do not think I can recall anything as touchingly beautiful in the way of verses connected with the tomb of a hapless couple,—anything wherein a warmth of colour at once so humanly sensuous and so divinely ethereal is thrown upon the cold deathly stillness of a marble monument. This is the conclusion of the poem :

‘ So sleep, for ever sleep, O Marble Pair !
 Or, if ye wake, let it be then, when fair
 On the carv'd Western Front a flood of light
 Streams from the setting sun, and colours bright
 Prophets, transfigur'd Saints, and Martyrs brave,
 In the vast western window of the nave ;
 And on the pavement round the Tomb there glints
 A chequer-work of glowing sapphire tints,
 And amethyst, and ruby ;—then unclose
 Your eyelids on the stone where ye repose,
 And from your broider'd pillows lift your heads,
 And rise upon your cold white marble beds ;
 And looking down on the warm rosy tints
 That chequer, at your feet, the illumin'd flints,
 Say—“ *What is this ? we are in bliss—forgiven—
 Behold the pavement of the courts of Heaven !* ”—
 Or let it be on Autumn nights, when rain
 Doth rustingly above your heads complain
 On the smooth loaden roof, and on the walls
 Shedding her pensive light at intervals
 The Moon through the clove-story windows shines,
 And the wind walls among the mountain pines.
 Then, gazing up through the dim pillars high,
 The foliag'd marble forest where ye lie,
 “ *Hush* ”—ye will say—“ *it is eternity.*
*This is the glimmering verge of Heaven, and these
 The columns of the Heavenly Palaces.* ”—
 And in the sweeping of the wind your ear
 The passage of the Angels' wings will hear,
 And on the lichen-crust'd leads above
 The rustle of the eternal rain of Love.’

It was a fine thought to invoke the medieval knight

and lady that lay in marble before the poet, and to wring as it were from those two hushed mouths of the chivalric age an exposition, so slight yet so perfect, of the connexion between the mysterious middle-age architecture and those medieval ideas of 'heaven' handed down even to these days — between the exquisite effects of evident nature and a supernaturalism not quite so evident. There is a spiritual cosmopolitanism here thoroughly worthy of Mr. Arnold's critical cosmopolitanism in regard to modern thought in foreign countries.

XIII.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

‘ Being tailed,
I’ll lash out lion-fashion, and leave apes
To dock their stump and dress their haunches up.’

R. BROWNING.

‘ Then he stood up, and trod to dust
Fear and desire, mistrust and trust,
And dreams of bitter sleep and sweet,
And bound for sandals on his feet
Knowledge and patience of what must
And what things may be, in the heat
And cold of years that rot and rust
And alter; and his spirit’s meat
Was freedom, and his staff was wrought
Of strength, and his cloak woven of thought.’

A. C. SWINBURNE.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

SPEAKING of Southey, Mr. Swinburne says, in his preface to Moxon's 'Miniature Byron,' 'A poet by profession, he had assaulted with feeble fury another poet, not on the fair and open charge of bad verses, but under the impertinent and irrelevant plea that his work was an affliction or an offence to religion and morality.' The issues involved in this remark having been discussed in my introduction, only need further discussion in so far as Mr. Swinburne's works may be deemed an offence to religion and morality. That two volumes of his have been so deemed is well known; and that they have in the main been rightly so deemed I am bound to record my opinion and shew my reasons. At the same time it must be admitted that the poet has very good ground for complaint against his assailants, for the manner and virulence of their attacks, and that these same attacks defeated in a great measure their own object. This was disastrous, for, to quote Mr. Swinburne's words, 'The question at issue is wider than any between a single writer and his critics:' it is not, however,

‘whether or not the first and last requisite of art is to give no offence; whether or not all that cannot be lisped in the nursery or fingered in the schoolroom is therefore to be cast out of the library; whether or not the domestic circle is to be for all men and writers the outer limit and extreme horizon of their world of work.’* No! the question is not this—not whether art shall adapt itself to the exigencies of infancy and youth, but whether art shall have liberty any more than life to be lawless, impious, immoral—baneful to the normal adult—and yet go out into the world without a word of protest or condemnation.

As soon as *Chastelard* and *Poems and Ballads* were in the hands of the public, it was felt that the new poet was offensive in his attitude; but I am not aware that in any instance an attempt was made to reason temperately upon the nature of his offences: in point of fact these lay almost within the same limits as those of his most violent critics, for both derive equally from deficiency of true sympathy and tolerance. Mr. Swinburne could not (and still cannot) tolerate creeds and codes without a place in his heart; and his critics could not tolerate a rebellion with which they of course had no sympathy. If the poet’s powers had been directed merely against dogmas and formulas, the matter at issue would not have been much; but what he really ‘afflicted’ in

* *Notes on Poems and Reviews*, p. 20.

right-minded people was the abstract moral sense and the true religious sentiment that rests at bottom of humanity when stripped of creeds and codes. Thus what the critics really felt was that Mr. Swinburne's verse was frequently *inhuman* in its bearings, that it tended to aggrandise with flawless workmanship bad models of human nature, to exalt the worse passions of man over the better, and to become such an irritant to the base in man as would in many cases excite people unwholesomely, and perhaps aid in opening the gates for the full torrent of animal appetites that are so tremendous in their fury when once liberated. I am disposed to think that some of the poet's defenders have altogether mistaken the grounds on which the outcry was founded. There exists at present a very strong party of right-thinking men whose voices are in favour of a greater outspokenness in literature; they protest against what they call the pruriency of prudery; and it has been thought that Mr. Swinburne gave offence simply by being too plain-spoken. Of course the answer to a charge of indecency of speech is clear enough:—Shakespeare, Dante, all the great poets held in universal esteem, unflinchingly 'called a spade a spade;' and why should not poets do so nowadays? We do not, it may be argued, complain of Shakespeare when he depicts the lower passions of man, however outspoken he may be in his treatment of them, and why may

not Mr. Swinburne have the same license? But that is wide of the mark. In a large art-work dealing with human nature broadly, it were mere castration to soften down the worse passions and treat the most infamous characters a whit less frankly than the noble ones; and all the great names that can be brought forward in support of the plea for plain speech and real wickedness in art will be found to be those who have treated human nature with a large truth. We do not find these great men—these Shakespeares and Dantes and Homers—picking out some mean phase of passion or feeling and pouring forth lyric effusions in the close groove of such passion or feeling: all that is most hideous in their delineations of character and passion is justly distributed among the sane and noble elements of the subject whatever it be. Now in the *Poems and Ballads* we frequently find an essentially nasty train of thought and passion tenderly set to a music that shows, and to a certain extent elicits, sympathy with such train of thought and passion: we find too that this train is not mingled with the elements of a sane humanity, but sought out and set in an order that it does not exist in normally; and we miss altogether those splendid antidotes to be found in every work of Shakespeare or any other of the supreme artists who have put foul things in their works because, as an American writer has beautifully expressed it, ‘God

puts them in his universe.' But whereas (to follow up the theistic figure of speech) God does not put them in his universe in such a measure as to tower above and hold in abeyance what is clean and sane and of good report, that is not art of the highest which exalts the baser passions from their subordinate sphere, and bestows on the inarticulate eloquence of the jungle, the pigsty and the apery a splendour of articulation reserved by high poets for high themes. Whatever be the art in which a man works, he will show more or less what his ideas of life are, or it may be he will show that he has no particular ideas at all on the subject, but merely an eye for isolated facts and appearances. If this last be the case we recognise no great merit in the man who selects meaningless or nasty facts and appearances, and dwells upon them as if they were the 'outer limit of his world of work.'

Let us now look at Mr. Swinburne's works in series; for whatever quarrel one may have with him on the grounds above stated, his position in our literature is of that importance that commands respectful and careful examination for his works. His earliest known book consists of two plays. *The Queen-Mother* is of the usual five-act dimensions, on the Elizabethan model; and the subject is good for dramatic purposes, the scene being laid in the court of Catherine de Medici and Charles IX., at the time

of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. The play shows an acute critical understanding of the Elizabethan drama, rather than an original dramatic faculty: Mr. Swinburne has probably read in his time every play produced in that great epoch; and his study seems to have been sufficiently close and discriminative to leave in his mind every element of construction employed by the Elizabethans. Consequently, when he wrote his play, it was a close imitation of the school in question—an imitation, too, in which many Elizabethan faults are not only followed, but exaggerated. Such a close and minute imitation cannot lead to great results. Judged by modern criteria as to minutiae of elaboration, the plays of even Shakespeare are found faulty. The varying length and structure of the iambic line employed by him and his school is a fault in the eyes of modern critics; and the irregular way in which the blank-verse dialogue of the Elizabethan school is pieced, so as to leave jagged fragments of iambic lines, and lines consisting of more feet than the typical line is composed of, is a thing to be regretted—not to be imitated. In some of the dialogues of Shakespeare which are most remarkable for vivid and rapid raillery there is a ruggedness of form which is anything but pleasing, if we consider the make of the lines apart from the brilliancy of the composition; and a ruggedness, too, which was obviously permitted to himself by the

supreme dramatist as an economy of labour—not put forward as a studied effect; but in *The Queen-Mother* we get speeches from Cino Galli, the Florentine fool of the Medici-woman, which are of a studied ruggedness wonderful to contemplate as the work of a modern poet. Such verse we can tolerate well enough in works of that stage in the development of English poetic art to which they belong; and it is but seldom that the reader gives a thought to the make of the verse in reading those great old plays; but now a more regularly perfect form of verse has come into use, and is looked for by the public. It is impossible to ignore the dramatic intelligence displayed in the outline of the play; but the imitation is so close, the faults so many, and the style so little individual, as to make the work unimportant.

The companion piece, *Rosamond*, displays the same constructive ability in a less degree; and the five scenes of which it is composed are well put together, if not interesting on the whole. There is great pathos in the close, the death of Rosamond. The last speech of Henry is forcible and thoughtful; but it is not truly original in style, although the latter part of it has a certain sharpness of diction that we associate with this poet rather than any other.

‘Time was, I could not speak
But she would praise or chide me; now I talk
All this time out, mere baffled waste, to get

That word of her I find not. Tell me, sweet,
 Have I done wrong to thee? spoken thee ill?
 Nay, for scorn hurts me, Rosamond; be wise,
 As I am patient; do but bow your face—
 By God she will not! Abide you but awhile
 And we shall hear her; for she will not fail.
 She will just turn her sweet head quietly
 And kiss me peradventure; say no word,
 And you shall see her; doubtless she will grow
 Sorry to vex me; see now, here are two
 She hath made weep, and God would punish her
 For hardness, ay though she were thrice as fair,
 He would not love her; look, she would fain wake,
 It makes her mouth move and her eyelids rise
 To feel so near me.—Ay, no wiser yet?
 Then will I leave you; maybe she will weep
 To have her hands made empty of me; yea,
 Lend me your hand to cover close her face,
 That she may sleep well till we twain be gone;
 Cover the mouth up; come each side of me.'

Though both these plays have a great stir of life in them, Mr. Swinburne has not revived the Elizabethan drama as Mr. Horne and Sir Henry Taylor have, by entering into the spirit of it thoroughly and not trammelling themselves with minute imitation. But in reviving the Greek drama the younger poet has been as successful as the two elder have been in the Elizabethan; and *Atalanta in Calydon*, the second of his books, takes its rank among the great poems of this century. It has been already noted (page 323) that Mr. Swinburne seems to have seized the meaning and tone of the great Greek drama more completely than Mr. Arnold has, while adopting it less straitly; and it is now time to point out some of the special beauties of this work. A good tragedy cast

in this lyric-dramatic mould is nowadays a great feat. Anything like a close analysis of Greek motives and psychological characteristics must have an air of affectation to a modern society so different from Greek society in all its complexities of life and thought: nor is it practicable to perform such an analysis with great effect, because the artist, of whatever class, must study nature direct if he would excel, and modern society affords no possibilities for the effectual study of a subject essentially Greek in incident and spirit. Yet subjects abound in Greek history and mythology which may be treated in modern verse with advantage; but then they are seized as essentially human, not as essentially Greek, and are treated from such a point of view as to be of interest to all ages. In Mr. Tennyson's *Ulysses*, it is not the traits distinctive of the Greek which go to the heart of the modern Englishman, but the sense of a struggling, energetic, undaunted hardihood of human endeavour, as vital now as then. Our sympathies are claimed by Ulysses the *man*, not Ulysses the *Greek*. And so it is in *Atalanta*, so far as that work depends on incident and sentiment. The story of Atalanta in Calydon is a fine story; and it is most fortunate that the poet has reproduced it here without any such strong antiquity of flavour as would have made it 'dry.' He has done but little violence to Greek tradition and character; but what he has

chiefly reproduced is the splendid beauty of form ; and it is impossible to admire unduly the perfect manner in which the action works itself out without any approach to tediousness, and yet without coming near to the borders of that crowded pageantry of the age of Elizabeth—so great in itself, and yet so poor when attempted less than greatly. How exquisitely the various exquisite bits of choric singing take up and pass on the subject from scene to scene, and how each piece of weighty melody expresses something grand and not extraneous to the matter in hand, must be well known by this time. And it is matter of congratulation that in this most important of the poet's larger performances there is nothing offensive in the manner in which some subsequent works are offensive.

The hunt of the Calydonian boar does not of course afford for artistic development that wealth of chambering and wantonness to be found in such subjects as that of *Chastelard* and in the multitude of unhistoric nameless intrigues that have been since the world began. The passion of vengeance, however, gets an appropriate development : in fact revenge is the chain of causation in the plot of *Atalanta*. The boar is a curse sent by Artemis, because that goddess is piqued at an omission of sacrifice to her. Meleager slays the boar, and gives the spoils to Atalanta. Meleager's uncles, wroth at this, and

jealous of the huntress, attempt to reverse their nephew's act by force ; and he turns upon them and slays them. His mother Althæa, hearing of this, forthwith compasses her son's death, in tribute to her brother's memory. But this chain is not made unpleasantly prominent. The capital point in *Atalanta* is the great chorus dividing the action centrally—coming after the appearance of dissension between the huntress and Meleager's uncles and before the slaying of the boar with its disastrous accompaniments. And the terrible views of life set forth in this chorus have a grand fitness of position. The sentiments are, however, so completely in keeping with the negative, revolutionary spirit, characteristic of Mr. Swinburne at that time, that the effusion strikes as the spontaneous utterance of an eloquent but misguided orator.

Magnificent as is the eloquence and exquisite as is the workmanship of the chorus, it does not seem quite sound from a technical point of view, because after opening in due polytheistic order, it suddenly makes a transition into monotheism, apparently for no other reason than the gratification of that anti-theism which was the author's evident creed at the time. First, *the gods* are blamed in the name of the chorus, and then words relating to *God* are quoted: from the opening words, 'Who hath given man speech,' to the end of the first ninety-two lines,

a bitter mood of polytheism is set forth ; and then monotheism comes in :

' For now we know not of them ; but one saith
 The gods are gracious, praising God ; and one,
 When hast thou seen ? or hast thou felt his breath
 Touch, nor consume thine eyelids as the sun,
 Nor fill thee to the lips with fiery death ?
 None hath beheld him, none
 Seen above other gods and shapes of things,
 Swift without feet and flying without wings,
 Intolerable, not clad with death or life,
 Insatiable, not known of night or day,
 The lord of love and loathing and of strife
 Who gives a star and takes a sun away ;
 Who shapes the soul, and makes her a barren wife
 To the earthly body and grievous growth of clay ;
 Who turns the large limbs to a little flame
 And binds the great sea with a little sand ;
 Who makes desire, and slays desire with shame ;
 Who shakes the heaven as ashes in his hand ;
 Who, seeing the light and shadow for the same,
 Bids day waste night as fire devours a brand,
 Smites without sword, and scourges without rod ;
 The supreme evil, God.'

After this we get that supreme utterance of what is very far from wholesome—

' Yea, with thine hate, O God, thou hast covered us,'

with all the torrent of marvellous incrimination which the world of letters knows so well. The point of view here is purely negative—mere opposition to a ruler of the universe conceived as existing ; and beside this it seems hardly artistic to make a Greek polytheist quote, about *God*, words saturated with an anti-theism of such late date that it could not

possibly have been quoted by the chorus in *Atalanta*. The fault, however, is wilful, not careless, and is doubtless bound up with the tremendous eloquence of the chorus.

Although this be the capital point in *Atalanta*, I am disposed to think that a more perfect piece of isolable work exists in that little second chorus—

‘ Before the beginning of years’—

which holds in its small dimensions and under its mellow music a piece of genuine sad paganism more in keeping with the work than what we have just been looking at. This blatant anti-theism is to be regretted in such a work; and, while noting it, it is necessary to note also the existence of a large share of wisdom and sane pathos in the same poem. It is not uncommon to meet in its pages such well-put sapience as this:

‘ For not the difference of the several flesh
Being vile or noble or beautiful or base
Makes praiseworthy, but purer spirit and heart
Higher than these meaner mouths and limbs, that feed,
Rise, rest, and are and are not;’

and there is a profound beauty and sweetness throughout in the attitude of Meleager to his mother, from the time when she tearfully warns him against the attractions of *Atalanta* to the last moments of that life she sacrifices by her own act and deed. His

sonship, for all he cannot be dissuaded from his fate, is perfect when he answers—

‘Queen, my whole heart is molten with thy tears,
And my limbs yearn with pity of thee, and love
Compels with grief mine eyes and labouring breath:
For what thou art I know thee, and this thy breast
And thy fair eyes I worship, and am bound
Toward thee in spirit and love thee in all my soul.
For there is nothing terribler to men
Than the sweet face of mothers, and the might.’

And he is even more tender when, with wasting breath, he absolves her and supplicates her to keep him in mind after his death. But after all, whatever be the moral and intellectual aspect of this poem, the salient feature will always be its perfect sustenance of harmonious word-work throughout, and the intensely elevated pitch of the choric portions.

The lapse of time between the issue of *The Queen-Mother* and that of *Atalanta* sufficed Mr. Swinburne for the formation of a distinctly individual style and manner. This is the first requisite of expression for a poet in these days of fine finish; and there is no question that Mr. Swinburne has devoted much labour to the elaboration of a potent poetic faculty. In the pages of *Poems and Ballads*, whether prurient or pure, there seem to be clearly enough marked the footsteps of progression from the no-manner of *The Queen-Mother* to the manner of *Atalanta*. Although *Poems and Ballads* appeared after *Atalanta*, a large portion of them are of earlier birth, as shown by the

various degrees of executive ability, and as confessed in the dedication—

‘For the youngest were born of boy’s pastime,
The eldest are young.’

And from the first, when his style was not original, Mr. Swinburne was never by any chance prosy, whatever his vices of sentiment and expression: even of his prose the same is true; and the whole of his works bear witness to the fact that the processes of his mind are carried on in the poetic method, as technically distinguished from the prose method.

We have seen that *Atalanta*, with all its largeness, is more lyric than dramatic: we must now look at *Chastelard*, on which no such remark would be quite just. In that work, Mr. Swinburne has shown that he is competent to apply dramatic principles without close imitation, and indeed to produce a greatly original play, at once finished and fit to act if need be—though no need is likely to arise for such subtle stage-work as this would be. There is much cleverness of invention in the conception of this historic subject; but, although it may be argued that history is common property, and that an artist may treat an historical topic from what point of view he pleases, it will probably be conceded by most intelligent persons that there is a lack of artistic propriety in painting the unhappy Queen of Scots as a wanton, cruel, and unhesitating strumpet, without

compassion or compunction, without religion of heart or soul, and caring for nothing but her own abominable gratifications. But words are weak to describe the terrible portrait Mr. Swinburne has drawn of the Queen.

My readers of course know that the 'hero' is the French nobleman notorious in history for his criminal passion for the Queen, and executed after being twice found secreted in her bed-chamber. Now this material might of course be dramatically treated without becoming prurient; but Mr. Swinburne, while freely idealising historical facts, has worked his modifications in the direction of worse than mere immorality. Over the libertine he throws a glow of something approaching nobility, and thus aggrandises a miserable animal passion. Over the unfortunate Queen he casts a glare transforming her admitted foibles to the likeness of all that is most hideous in licentiousness, in deceit, in wanton cruelty, in wilful, heartless tampering with passion.

The exquisite colouring of some passages in the speeches of Chastelard is at times sufficient to disarm the loathing with which one loathes the man's motives on calm reflection. When hidden in the Queen's chamber, awaiting her entry on the night of her marriage with Darnley, Chastelard soliloquises with a fervour worthy of a better cause; and when the Queen comes in, and has sent Darnley away on

the plea of praying, there is a dialogue sufficiently heart-stirring in its tenderness of expression to throw in shade the abominable villany of the situation. After Chastelard has discovered himself, the Queen, on this night of her marriage with another man, detains the intruder thus :

‘ Speak, if you will: yet if you will be gone,
Why, you shall go, because I hate you not.
You know that I might slay you with my lips,
With calling out? but I will hold my peace.’

And Chastelard replies :

‘ Yea, do some while. I had a thing to say;
I know not wholly what thing. O my sweet,
I am come here to take farewell of love
That I have served, and life that I have lived
Made up of love, here in the sight of you
That all my life's time I loved more than God,
Who quits me thus with bitter death for it.
For you well know that I must shortly die,
My life being wound about you as it is,
Who love me not; yet do not hate me, sweet,
But tell me wherein I came short of love;
For doubtless I came short of a just love,
And fell in some fool's fault that angered you. . . .
You answer not, but your lips curl in twain
And your face moves; there, I shall make you weep
And be a coward too; it were much best
I should be slain.’

But afterwards she does answer him,—

‘ I love you best of them.
Clasp me quite round till your lips cleave on mine,
False mine, that did you wrong.’

After much tender converse, she tries to persuade

him to save his life by escape; but he, determined to die, remains to be taken. Immediately before his execution, she visits him in prison; and very beautiful are the phrases in which the two express their 'love.' But all genuine charm must vanish if one shuts the book and reflects that the object of Chastelard's adoration, as here depicted, is a queen who has, since he was incarcerated, used every sleight to get him put out of the way, lest he publicly avow her complicity in his guilt. This woman, whose parting with her paramour is made so redolent of devotion, has attempted to persuade her brother to dispatch him secretly in prison, has tried to get him sent without further question from the country, has signed his death-warrant, has issued a reprieve, and finally, having come to beg her reprieve back lest that shame her, and having found that he has destroyed it out of consideration for her honour, she gives herself up to his fondnesses, and tells him that he, whom she is about to let be executed, is dearer to her than all others!

The man acts his part of mad immoral devotion under a full sense of the Queen's depravity, so that all his lavished endearments, and a keen though one-sided sense of honour, are ignominiously tacked on to what is neither more nor less than a low sensual appetite. The hideous incongruity of a man with touches of nobility, devoted utterly to a passion for

a woman whom he knows to be false and bad, and towards whom converge what promptings of honour and responsibility he has, regardless of all the rest of this world and the next, is finished by a touch as masterly in its incongruous wickedness as the rest; for to crown all, he is made to die with a damning lie on his lips, at the conclusion of a speech as refined in its courtesy as could have been devised.

The misemployment of noble powers seems to me to be at its worst in *Chastelard* rather than in *Poems and Ballads*; because the drama shows a settled and determined will to carry out an essentially nasty conception. There are technical faults in the work; but they are as nothing compared with the great strength of hand in moulding the subject in large, the extraordinary acuteness in following out intricate trains of emotion and thought, and the extreme delicacy and beauty of expression if one examines the texture of the verse.

In *Poems and Ballads* we get much the same characteristics, but mingled with others. There are a large number of poems of an unmarred and flawless beauty for which we cannot be too grateful. Every man of fine sensibilities can accompany the poet with unmixed pleasure

‘To the place of the slaying of Itylus,
The feast of Daulis, the Thracian sea,’

and listen while he translates into exquisite music of

words that exquisite legend of Progne and Philomela. We can all go with him to *The Garden of Proserpine* and drink in thankfully the sad perfect strain he pours forth there, or listen with rapt hearts to that *Leave-taking* wherein he calls upon his songs to 'sing all once more together,' ere they and he 'give up, go down,' for lack of love from one they have loved. Most of us can enjoy the wonder of wild words shaped into that miracle of artificial form that is indeed *Rococo*, and all but the few for whom Mariolatry stands on the threshold can enter with the poet into pagan Rome at the proclamation of christianity, and delight in *The Hymn to Proserpine* with its passionate adoration for the pagan goddesses of love and death, and its contempt for the meagrenesses of the new faith. But it is when we have to follow into that region of fierce loves and light loves where we meet with

'Faustine, Fragoletta, Dolores,
Félice and Yolande and Juliette,'

that the healthy-minded right-hearted man finds his delight in the poet's fine grasp and sharp keen music and acuteness of vision altogether spoiled by the unhealthy furnacc-blasts of a meanly passionate atmosphere. The average stomach will not stand such things as the lingering talk of eating a woman, in *Anactoria*,—

‘That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat
 Thy breasts as honey! that from face to feet
 Thy body were abolished and consumed,
 And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!’

And still more hard to stomach are the details of that leprous amour which *The Leper* discloses. When we have closed the collection, and cast off somewhat the sense of these more loathsome things, there remains simply the impression of a mind in complete abandonment—not merely loosed from the thralldom of superstition and king-worship and priest-fear, but from all ties, of whatever nature, that bind men within the seemly bounds of decency and tolerance. Enfranchisement is one thing—abandonment another; and the objection to these poems is simply that no one who does not admire wickedness at least as much as goodness, and think immorality as moral as morality and filth as clean as cleanliness, can turn from page to page without the fear of meeting something to offend even those who are not so very susceptible.

There was something of this unguided wildness in the earlier poems of Mr. Swinburne’s new era of work—poems written since he laid aside, at all events for a season, the glorification of unholy loves and took to themes of wide interest. In *A Song of Italy* and some occasional pieces of less importance there is an evident lack of ballast and want of clearness as to point of view; and in another very important divi-

sion of work, the prose essays intermediate between *Poems and Ballads* and *Songs before Sunrise*, we may note the same rashness of utterance. But what is important in these essays is the extraordinary clearness of critical view discernible if one strips off a little of the hyperbole of expression; and still more noteworthy is the fact that Mr. Swinburne's enthusiasm has led him to maintain throughout a great portion of every essay a distinctly poetic level and afflatus. In fact these works, which with the exception of the book on Blake are merely pamphlets and magazine-articles, should be collected and printed together; and they would probably be found to embody as noteworthy a collection of *Petites Poèmes en Prose* as those of the late M. Baudelaire. These words on Mr. Watts's Clytie are instinct with many of the attributes of poetry, and have but little of the nature of prose: 'Large, deep-bosomed, superb in arm and shoulder, as should be the woman growing from flesh into flower through a godlike agony, from fairness of body to fulness of flower, large-leaved and broad of blossom, splendid and sad—yearning with all the life of her lips and breasts after the receding light and the removing love—this is the Clytie indeed whom sculptors and poets have loved for her love of the Sun their God. . . . We seem to see the lessening sunset that she sees, and fear too soon to watch that stately beauty slowly suffer change and

die into flower, that solid sweetness of body sink into petal and leaf.'

On Mr. Arnold's beautiful poem *The Forsaken Merman*, he has written what seems to me a poem almost as beautiful. He says that that of Mr. Arnold 'Has in it the pathos of natural things, the tune of the passion we fancy in the note of crying birds or winds weeping, shrill and sweet and estranged from us; the swift and winged wail of something lost midway between man's life and the life of things soulless, the wail overheard and caught up by the fitful northern fancy, filling with glad and sad spirits the untravelled ways of nature; the clear cry of a creature astray in the world, wild and gentle and mournful, heard in the sighing of weary waters before dawn under a low wind, in the rustle and whistle and whisper of leaves or grasses, in the long light breaths of twilight air heaving all the heather on the hills, in the coming and going of the sorrowful strong seas that bring delight and death, in the tender touch and recoil of the ripple from the sand; all the fanciful pitiful beauty of dreams and legends born in grey windy lands, on shores and hill-sides whose life is quiet and wild.'

Among the most enjoyable of these productions are the *Notes on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence* (*Fortnightly Review*, July 1868); and there is much that is valuable and interesting in the *Notes*.

on *Shelley's Text* (in the same review for May 1869). But the poet's most extraordinary feat in prose is his essay on his sometime master Mr. D. G. Rossetti—a piece which surpasses in sustained afflatus, eloquence, and vivid beauty any poem in prose that exists in the language. However, with *Songs before Sunrise* still to look at, I must abstain from any further remarks on the author's poems in prose.

Erotic poetry must as a rule be peculiarly self-regarding—poetry of a political or social tendency as far the reverse as it is possible to any given poet to render his effusions. Thus, while *Poems and Ballads* is perhaps the most self-contemplative volume of good verse the English-speaking world has seen for some time—the most ruthless in bringing men's worser passions before them through the contemplation and reflection of a single self's lower nature—*Songs before Sunrise*, devoted almost exclusively to high thought and to the larger movements of nations, is on the whole the most triumphant strain of music, since Shelley's times, wherein one's peculiar self-notes have been merged in the large harmonies of humanitarian reflection. It was easy to conceive that the intense nature of a poet who dwelt upon certain sins with the stress and fervour of Mr. Swinburne—who regarded them as sins 'worth sinning with all the whole soul's will'—might, if differently.

directed, bring noble things to pass ; and when Love (so-called) gets superseded by Freedom, and the universal ideal Republic assumes the place and power of Aphrodite over a passionate musical soul, it is not surprising that the poetic result should have a great value and a noble bearing. But if *Poems and Ballads* wounded deeper sensibilities than those seated in the shell of prudery our modern society wears, *Songs before Sunrise* pierce similarly beyond the mere external orthodoxy of the same society. In proclaiming Freedom and the Republic the poet does not assail the simple outworks of institutions that are sanctioned by the natural conservative sluggishness found even in the most progressive of peoples—institutions not greatly dear even though left untouched : the Republic means with him democracy in its extremest form ; and Freedom means freedom up to the last point of political, social, and religious enfranchisement. Before the fury of such a freedom, kings and gods, priests and superstitious creeds, must, ere it fulfil itself, alike fall and be burnt up in the light of its countenance. It is a freedom active, fierce, defiant, destructive, just as his old negative freedom was ; but happily it has also its constructive side. It does not strike at the root of all theology for the sake of wounding what is personally disagreeable to the poet, but because all theology is conceived by him as standing in the light of

man's soul and impeding the due service of humanity. The two most remarkable poems in this sense, *Before a Crucifix* and the *Hymn of Man*, have been accused of 'wanton virulence;' but, regarded with a fair degree of intelligent sympathy, neither poem is either wanton or virulent. Both are exceedingly grand and full of fine feeling; but it is only just to admit that the present stage of modern thought could have afforded a greater leniency than Mr. Swinburne has shown towards the ideas of God and of Christ as God. There is a default of historic keenness in regarding those ideas as merely noxious, and ignoring the immense services they have done for man. None the less, seeing these ideas but as stumbling-blocks in the path of mankind, and writing with a fervid conviction, the poet cannot in fairness be called 'wanton,' however unrelenting the fierceness of his assault. The poem *Before a Crucifix* ought to be saved from misunderstanding by the verses of tender yearning towards the humanity of Christ, which verses should make it perfectly clear that it is an idea, not a man or a god (in the poet's mind at all events), against which the fulminant last verses are hurled:

'Thou bad'st let children come to thee;
What children now but curses come?
What manhood in that God can be
Who sees their worship, and is dumb?
No soul that lived, loved, wrought, and died,
Is this their carrion crucified.

Nay, if their God and thou be one,
 If thou and this thing be the same,
 Thou shouldst not look upon the sun;
 The sun grows haggard at thy name.
 Come down, be done with, cease, give o'er;
 Hide thyself, strive not, be no more.'

Similarly, what was unwholesome anti-theism in the great chorus of *Atalanta* has come with lapse of years and growth of thought to be something positive and tangible in the *Hymn of Man*: to believe in a God and to place oneself in an attitude of defiance and hate towards him must always be considered undesirable for a poet, as for any other man or woman; but to arrive at the firm conviction that God is an idea—a figment of the human brain, preserved to the detriment of liberty and progress—is neither blameworthy nor praiseworthy in a poet or in another: it is a simple movement of his intellect, over which he has no control. Nor can it be much more than a matter of taste what measure of strong language may be permitted to a poet in declaiming against ideas he disbelieves with evident sincerity, and in favour of ideas on which, with equal sincerity, he looks as the only saviours of a very imperfect society. When it is premised that

'Thou and I and he are not gods made men for a span,
 But God, if a God there be, is the substance of men which is man;'

and when this idea is worked out with a keenness of thought and a magnificence of speech farthest from

levity, there can be no impropriety in such a natural sequence of incrimination as that which ends with

‘By the scourges of doubt and repentance that fell on the soul at
thy nod,
Thou art judged, O judge, and the sentence is gone forth against
thee, O God.
Thy slave that slept is awake; thy slave but slept for a span;
Yea, man thy slave shall unmake thee, who made thee lord over
man.’

Man, the slave of an idea, is simply shown in revolt against such idea. Nor does the strong exultation of the final lines pass into any lightness of mockery, although to those who treasure theistic creeds it must be exceedingly shocking:

‘They cry out, thine elect, thine aspirants to heavenward, whose
faith is as flame;
O thou the Lord God of our tyrants, they call thee, their God, by
thy name.
By thy name that in hell-fire was written, and burned at the
point of thy sword,
Thou art smitten, thou God, thou art smitten; thy death is upon
thee, O Lord.
And the love-song of earth as thou diest resounds through the
wind of her wings—
Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things.’

Even if there be a merciless raillery in much of this hymn, we can hardly deny to the modern poet a leniency of judgment accorded to the prophet Elijah in that precisely parallel situation from which some of the very words of the *Hymn of Man* have come down; for when Mr. Swinburne, the prophet of Freedom and Nature and Man, cries against the worship of a

Jehovah whose existence he denies, he propounds the same grim 'peradventures' that were propounded by the prophet of Jehovah, in crying against the worshippers of Baal whose godhead he denied.

This poem is, in some respects beside that of metre, the pendant to the *Hymn to Proserpine*; but, while that sorrowful poem of superb beauty was doubly negative and hopelessly sad in its meaning, this one, if less exquisite in its cadences and harmonies, balances negation with assertion, builds out of triumph hope, and offers positive existences as worship-worthy in the room of those ideas it seeks to crush with scorn. The *Hymn to Proserpine*, admitting the fall of the pagan gods, prophesied the fall of Christ's kingdom,—worked on the sombre key-note (doubtless generally remembered for its passionate sob of music),

'Thou art more than the Gods who number the days of our temporal breath;
For these give labour and slumber; but thou, Proserpina, death,'

and ended on the same note of woe—

'So long I endure, no longer; and laugh not again, neither weep.
For there is no God found stronger than death; and death is a sleep.'

Whereas the *Hymn of Man*, with a philosophy neither hazardous nor flimsy, proclaims without compromise what things the poet finds worthy of honour:

and worship in place of what he considers not only obsolete but actively harmful.

It is not surprising that Mr. Swinburne should have been accused of wantonness in these *Songs*, because there are things in his antecedents that would certainly lend a colour to the charge, and notably some sonnets which we may congratulate ourselves on not finding included in the *Songs before Sunrise*. I mean his *Intercession* for the Emperor, published in the *Fortnightly Review* for November 1869. It is perhaps in accord with general views concerning all forms of republicanism, that any person professing to entertain favourable feelings thereanent must of necessity be sufficiently embruted for the performance of a savage war-dance around the very death-bed of any professed opponent; and before Mr. Swinburne's recent proclamation it was well-known that, when his muse led him to pass from the sickening messalinism of his favourite subject-matter to glance at political topics, he was enough revolutionary to earn the epithet 'red-republican.' But probably no one was prepared for anything as poisonously inhuman as those four sonnets concerning the failing health of the Emperor Napoleon III. Under the title of *Intercession*, and on the cleverly adapted text 'Ave Cæsar Imperator, morituum te saluto,' Death was besought to allow the Emperor a little further space of life in order that he might see his dreams

of power fall away from him and die only when his cup of misery might be full. Mr. Swinburne has learned many things from M. Victor Hugo; but it was surely not from the man who wrote *Napoléon le Petit* and *Les Châtiments*, while the Emperor was strong in his perfidiously-gotten power, that any disciple could learn to yell hysterical invective and taunt through the corridors of the Tuileries while the same Emperor lay broken in body and laxly grasping the sceptre. M. Victor Hugo, or any other legitimate representative of contemporary French republicanism, would probably be the last to hiss into the ears of a man deemed dying horrible whispers of comfort drawn from such dying man's dire discomfort, of pleasure taken at his protracted pain. The decadence of the second Empire, built upon a foundation of broken oaths and cemented with blood, may yield a fair text or so for the calm moralising of some future historian; and to see ill-gotten empery, however well wielded, fall away may give as wholesome a satisfaction to the sense of justice as on the blood-for-blood principle the execution of a murderer gives. But no decent person goes to the scaffold to revel in the murderer's agonies; and it is in the lowest degree indecent to 'heap up words' of personal insult and brutal invective against a falling and dying potentate, however justly falling. The crescendo of cruelty in Mr. Swinburne's four sonnets, the paltering with

human misery, the catlike clawing of the victim to and fro, can only be realised by those who choose to get the sonnets and read them; for no description will give any idea of them. One would fain hope that the absence of this grim *Intercession* from the collection of *Songs before Sunrise* is evidence of a humane scrupulousness in regard to the man fallen from his high estate since the sonnets were printed. It may be asked why they are brought forward in connection with the *Songs*; and the answer is—First because they have a community of subject with the book, secondly because they seem to mark an intermediate stage between the nastinesses of *Poems and Ballads* and the wide beauty of *Songs before Sunrise*, and thirdly because they are perfect specimens of the sonnet form, and cannot be taken back after having once been given to the public. Being on a subject of the greatest interest to all the civilised world, they move in a better sphere than the sphere of low sexual passion, and they yet retain the lowering element of abandonment to an inhuman animalism—an animalism of hate instead of an animalism of lust. There is nothing like this in *Songs before Sunrise*. The most violent verses I recall are directed against imperialism—not against the Emperor:

‘ With all its coils crushed, all its rings uncurled,
The one most poisonous worm that soiled the world
Is wrenched from off the throat of man, and hurled
Into deep hell from empire’s helpless height.

Time takes no more infection of it now;
Like a dead snake divided of the plough,
The rotten thing lies cut in twain; but thou,
Thy fires shall heal us of the serpent's bite.'

And it is a large gain to art that that degree of violence which we may rest assured Mr. Swinburne will ever retain should be directed into a channel where it is serviceable, and against ideas instead of against people.

There are some poems in the volume—the *Hymn of Man*, for instance, and *Hertha*—which might readily be supposed to be pantheistic in dogma; but a little collation and analysis cannot fail in leading to the conclusion that the poet who so marvellously uses all the choicest elements of the vocabulary in which we know Hebrew and Christian theology—uses them too for purposes diametrically opposed to their original purpose—has merely availed himself of the alluringly beautiful phraseology and ideology of advanced pantheism to array in a gorgeous garb of symbolism a creed very far removed from the pantheistic. If Mr. Swinburne's creed be describable in one word, that word must be made for the occasion—pananthropism: man, with him, is not only 'the master of things;' but to his piercing mind-sight, the freedom of nature's doings presents so exact an analogy with the freedom that should be man's in all his doings, that he sees the spirit of man (which be it borne in mind he calls 'God') everywhere

animating and informing the universe. There is not any trustworthy ground for seeing these at first sight pantheistic symptoms as other than manifestations of the masterly power this poet has always shown of giving to things outward a human colouring and a human cry such as is the making of the highest poetry. He sees liberty latent everywhere, and, as a poet, he speaks of that abstraction as a woman: he sees that everything is dependent for its value on the senses of man and man alone, and, as a poet, he expresses that thought in terms that are figurative. If he did otherwise, the abstractions and ideas that are so grandly embodied and endowed with form and voice in *Songs before Sunrise* would be but abstractions and ideas, and not poetry at all.

The greatest portrait he has given us of Liberty is in *Mater Dolorosa*: the conception of her as a woman 'fairer of face than the daughters of men,' sitting 'by the wayside, in a rent stained raiment, the robe of a cast-off bride,' is embodied in a manner that is simply sublime; and a higher sublimity is reached in *Mater Triumphalis*, when the poet sings his rhapsody of self-devotion to the cause, and adjures the 'dreadful mother' not to spare him. The eloquence of these verses is hardly to be surpassed:

'I am the trumpet at thy lips, thy clarion

Full of thy cry, sonorous with thy breath;

The graves of souls born worms and creeds grown carrion

Thy blast of judgment fills with fires of death.

Thou art the player whose organ-keys are thunders,
 And I beneath thy foot the pedal prest;
 Thou art the ray whereat the rent night sunders,
 And I the cloudlet borne upon thy breast.

I shall burn up before thee, pass and perish,
 As haze in sunrise on the red sea-line;
 But thou from dawn to sun-setting shalt cherish
 The thoughts that led and souls that lighted mine. . . .

I am thy storm-thrush of the days that darken,
 Thy petrel in the foam that bears thy bark
 To port through night and tempest; if thou hearKen,
 My voice is in thy heaven before the lark.

My song is in the mist that hides thy morning,
 My cry is up before the day for thee;
 I have heard thee and beheld thee and give warning,
 Before thy wheels divide the sky and sea.'

In a little song called *The Oblation*, simple in its utter devotion, we get something of the same idea differently stated: it is a song to Liberty again; it *might be* a love-song of the loveliest. Far from simple in workmanship, it has an artificial form so exquisitely done that nothing but spontaneity is apparent; and the same may be said of *Messidor*, in which a sort of fugued movement, with the fine burden 'Put in the sickles and reap,' is made to tell nobly of the harvest of good things waiting the sickle of the 'kingly people.' It is impossible to take up here each poem of this collection that is important, for there are but few that have not a certain weight as portions of one gospel,—and that the most vivid, urgent, and flaming of latter-day evangels.

This evangel has not the perfect sanity and might of hand found in the evangel of Walt Whitman ; but while that takes its lordly station in the foundations of a new world, this must not be overlooked among the greater attempts of poets to relume the splendours of the old world so far as they are overshadowed by the oppressions men have to suffer from men.

But though there be many *Songs before Sunrise* for which I cannot spare the word I would gladly give, there is yet a poem, properly belonging to them, though not included in them, which I cannot omit to mention, the *Ode on the Proclamation of the French Republic, September 4, 1870*. As an ode, I think this excels any ode of the present century. Published separately before the *Songs before Sunrise*, it was then the finest of the author's political poems. It is more truly humane than anything he had published, and it is saved from the proverbial dreariness of odes by its fine neo-classicism of form and its full-hearted eloquence. *A Song of Italy*, longer and more ambitious, lacks form and perspicuity ; but this ode is clear in thought and splendid in form. Instead of wanton talk of a nation 'glorious and blood-red, fair with dust of battles and deaths of kings,' it recognises pathetically the dreadfulness of the crisis in which liberty again seized on the heart of France. Avoiding personal attack and windy de-

clamation, the poet set himself seriously to grasp the great outlines of the most terrible situation the world has seen these many years. He seems to have yearned over this young republic and its forerunners and accompaniments of national agony with an unlooked-for tenderness; and his cry of intercession to the human race is surpassingly lofty and admirably broad. The opening of the epode, on nature's universal republic, is one of the noblest strains I know:

'All the lights of the sweet heaven that sing together;
 All the years of the green earth that bare man free;
 Rays and lightnings of the fierce or tender weather,
 Heights and lowlands, wastes and headlands of the sea,
 Dawns and sunsets, hours that hold the world in tether,
 Be our witnesses and seals of things to be.
 Lo the mother, the Republic universal,
 Hands that hold time fast, hands feeding men with might,
 Lips that sing the song of the earth, that make rehearsal
 Of all seasons, and the sway of day with night,
 Eyes that see as from a mountain the dispersal,
 The huge ruin of things evil, and the flight;
 Large exulting limbs, and bosom godlike moulded
 Where the man-child hangs, and womb wherein he lay;
 Very life that could it die would leave the soul dead,
 Face whereat all fears and forces flee away,
 Breath that moves the world as winds a flower-bell folded,
 Feet that trampling the gross darkness, beat out day.'

A word on the workmanship of *Songs before Sunrise* must be the last. We have learned to expect from the author of *Atalanta*, *Chastelard*, and *Poems and Ballads* perfection of craftsmanship up to the full height of the poet's own ideal. Careful revision is evident through all those works. *Songs before Sunrise* are unequal in this respect. They show, as

a rule, the same extraordinary intuition of perfect work shown in the other volumes; but several of them seem faulty for mere lack of revision. No one who knows this poet's method can believe he deliberately prefers the halting cadence of the line

‘With breasts palpitating and wings refurled’

to the cadence the line would have if ‘palpitating’ preceded ‘breasts;’ no one can think he considers ‘despondencies’ a rhyme to ‘sea’s’ (p. 2), ‘disbelief’ a rhyme to ‘leaf’ (p. 1), ‘restoratives’ to ‘alternatives,’ or ‘hours’ to ‘ours’ (p. 4), ‘cadences’ to ‘sea’s,’ ‘feet’ to ‘defeat’ (pp. 6, 7); and these are taken at random from one poem, the *Prelude*: there are plenty of such defects elsewhere in the book; and the poet would probably have seen them as defects if he had noticed them,—as also such figurative incompatibilities as that overlooked on page 96, in the grand image of the people crucified by king-craft and priest-dom. In carrying out the crucificial idea of an unenfranchised race, Mr. Swinburne actually works through the taking down from the cross, wrapping in grave-clothes, and deposition in a grave in the ‘blood-bought field,’ asks

‘what man or what angel known
Shall roll back the sepulchral stone?’

and then goes on to say—

' They have no tomb to dig, and hide ;
Earth is not theirs, that they should sleep.
On all these tombless crucified
No lovers' eyes have time to weep.
So still, for all man's tears and creeds,
The sacred body hangs and bleeds.'

It is hard that the splendid pathos of such an imagery should be marred, if ever so little, for lack of care. Matters of dogma one may fairly leave to dogmatic religionists for settlement among themselves ; but to point out such technical flaws as those named above is the critic's bounden duty : he must not shirk either this or the still less grateful task of noting where the poet is deficient or excessive in the weightier matters of sentiment and passion.



XIV.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

'The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters is simplicity. Nothing is better than simplicity nothing can make up for excess or for the lack of definiteness. To carry on the heave of impulse and pierce intellectual depths and give all subjects their articulations are powers neither common nor very uncommon. But to speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside is the flawless triumph of art.'

WALT WHITMAN.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

THAT Mr. Morris's principal works are a revival of the spirit of Chaucer's times and of the manner of Chaucer's verse has already been indicated in my introduction; and yet to say that his poetry is in any strict sense *reproductive* of Chaucer would be as incorrect as to class him with Shakespeare or Browning. The truth is that although the manner of his best-known works is founded on that of Chaucer, and although the medium through which he looks at things is precisely analogous to that which lent largeness and minute beauty to Chaucer's delineations, there is yet an entire originality of language as well as of idea, for which he is indebted, not to Chaucer or any other, but to the wide resources of a unique mind. There is not in Mr. Morris's books any passage which can be called an imitation or plagiarism of his great forerunner. The influence of the one mind on the other is subtly felt, as the influence of Shelley is felt in reading Browning's *Sordello*, only in a more palpable degree in proportion as the mental qualities exhibited in the writings of Chaucer and Mr. Morris are of a more palpable and less subtle order than

those shown in the works of Shelley and Browning. The resemblance of Mr. Morris's poetry to that of Chaucer consists partly in the choice of subjects, and partly in the method of treating them. His subjects are entirely classical or medieval, his method always medieval.

Whether we read Chaucer or Mr. Morris, we get much the same processional splendour of descriptiveness where multitudes and largeness of action are concerned, the same minute yet significant delicacy of detail where individual action is the artist's subject, the same comprehensive attention to situation and surroundings, the same naïve implicitness of belief where anything inconceivable to a modern mind is to be told (as is constantly the case with both poets). In this they are rivals, standing apart from all others, that they show a full sympathy with that stage of human development represented in each tale; and this is compassed partly by a forthright statement of the facts as they are supposed to have occurred, and partly by such an ingenuous and inventorial minuteness of circumstance as disarms all suspicion that the narrator questions the genuineness of his tale. Now this is the most indispensable quality to be sought for in simple tale-telling; and without this the utmost agreeableness of diction and the highest perfection of metre and rhythm are of no avail. We must not forget that this Chaucerian

class of poetry is altogether unmodern, so that unless it reached in the hands of a contemporary artist such a perfection as it might attain in the social medium wherein it first grew up, it could not receive more than a meagre recognition; and the cordial reception of Mr. Morris speaks volumes as to the quality of his tale-singing.

It is natural that most of the characteristics of contemporary poetic workmanship should be at a minimum in these productions; and in the use of metres and so on we find Mr. Morris entirely estranged from his contemporaries. Instead of inventing new metres, he has adopted three good homely instruments used by Chaucer,—the seven-line stanza of *Troilus and Criseide*, *The Flower and the Leaf*, and other poems, the old-fashioned five-foot couplet of *The Knight's Tale*, used by Pope in translating the *Iliad*, and the four-foot couplet of *The Romaunt of the Rose* and *The Book of the Duchess*, afterwards employed in the construction of *Hudibras*; and of these three instruments he has availed himself without that attention to minute construction shown in modern metres, or in pre-existent metres under modern treatment. We get here broad cadences of music, an unfaltering flow of rhythm, easy perspicuity of rhyme, fine large outlines of construction, but not usually any minute delicacies or startling intricacies; and this is precisely what should be the

case, for this reason : Mr. Morris's works treat largely of action, incident, external form, colour, and so on; and he usually deals with only the simpler phases of emotion. His subjects engage attention in regard to the development of the story; and it would be an interruption hardly desirable to have to pause over minutiae of manipulation when we want to follow out the large effects of the artist. The adornments that we want and get take the form of vivid and exquisite pictures, resulting from force of imagination and readiness of expression, and so clear and well-defined as to need no study on the reader's part to take them in. The interest is always sufficiently sustained by wealth of imagination, unfaltering straightforwardness of action, entire absence of anything like commonplace, and an adequate degree of force, sweetness, and propriety of expression. Above all, the work is always distinctly poetry—not prose draped in a transparent veil of pseudo-poetry : to whatever length his works may run we do not miss in them that condensation without which verse can never be poetry.

In the ordinary books of reference, mythology and folk-lore, especially Greek myth and romance, are reduced to their lowest possible terms, and deprived of all aroma; but in Mr. Morris's books we have the added aroma of true poetic method and imagination, to supply what is so delicately fugitive in the ordinary process of distillation, as well as a rare discrimina-

tive tact to eliminate such of the grosser elements of the subject as are inessential, though retained in the exaggerated prose nakedness of the books of reference. These poems are such as no man need scruple to take home to his wife and leave within reach of his children; for if unimpregnated with modern doctrine, they are at least innocent of what is gross in ancient creeds. Of philosophy there is just enough to afford the poet a point of view from which to treat his subjects. Without a moderately palpable point of view it is impossible to show great unity of intention; but Mr. Morris's point of view, though sufficient for this purpose, is as unmodern as his subjects and method. In fact, whatever philosophy is expressed or implied gives rise to no inconvenience in treating his chosen subjects: from the hardy minds of the old world he has adopted all that is kindly, humane, resignedly brave, and a little of what is sad in the pathetic belief in a short life soon to be forgotten; but the evident healthiness of a robust manly soul has saved him from deforming his works by any fatal admixture of that maudlin anti-theism which cannot but mar the calm beauty of an antique ideal. There is no trace here of unhealthy revolt against circumstance and law; and although we may learn lessons to struggle after attainable good and away from avoidable evil, we are made to feel at the same time the beauty and strength of manly submission to the inevitable, so

that if one calls the poet 'pagan,' it is but in the negative sense of exhibiting no essential and distinctive modern principle, esthetic, ethic, or religious.

Some of the foregoing remarks apply almost exclusively to *The Life and Death of Jason* and to those twenty-five poems which make up *The Earthly Paradise*; but before looking at those works in detail it is necessary to glance at Mr. Morris's early volume, *The Defence of Guenevere and other Poems*. That volume has very striking affinities with the poetry of more than one contemporary writer. Mr. Rossetti's influence is the easiest to discern; but there are also several attempts at psychological art, clearly indicating Browning's influence; and while the book is altogether a very charming one, this divided allegiance seems to have had the effect of rendering the workmanship incongruous and incomplete. Connected mainly with the age of chivalry in subject, every page is full of an exquisitely tender feeling; and in many instances there is great splendour of imagination; but we do not get, as a rule, that luxuriant fitness of method to subject which Mr. Morris displayed nine years later in his *Jason*. Several small poems are master-pieces in their way; and every poem in the book is full of beauties. But such pieces as *Shameful Death*, *The Judgment of God*, and *Old Love*, monologues dealing subtly with the soul, have

more real analogy with ballad poetry than with monologue poetry of the modern type, and would probably have been more perfect had they been executed in ballad form. In *The Judgment of God* in particular, the actual point of time whereat the monologue is spoken is anything but clearly distinguished from points of past time referred to. It is interesting to compare this piece with *The Haystack in the Floods*, which is admirably graphic in narration, and as complete and excellent in its degree as are some later higher flights of Mr. Morris. *The Judgment of God* is spoken by an evil-hearted knight about to engage in single combat with a good knight who, as he fears, is to overcome him; the mental material is the series of thoughts passing through the false knight's mind immediately before engaging in the combat; and so mistily are some of the verses framed, that it is hard to know whether the facts referred to in them have just taken place, or are from the storehouse of old memories. The monologue opens with the quoted words of the speaker's father, giving instruction how to win the fight by means of a sudden stratagem in the lists; and the speaker's faint-heartedness is indicated in a manner more *objective* than perspicuous, by the words 'The blue owls on my father's hood were a little dimm'd as I turn'd away,'—apparently meaning that sickness so far dimmed his own eyes that he could not

see his father's badge plainly. Then he talks dimly of the wrong done, the origin of his faint-heartedness, and continues :

' And all the wrong is gather'd now
 Into the circle of these lists—
 Yea, howl out, butchers! tell me how
 His hands were cut off at the wrists;
 And how Lord Roger bore his face
 A league above his spear-point, high
 Above the owls, to that strong place
 Among the waters—yea, yea, cry :
 " What a brave champion we have got!
 Sir Oliver, the flower of all
 The Hainault knights." The day being hot,
 He sat beneath a broad white pall,
 White linen over all his steel;
 What a good knight he look'd! his sword
 Laid thwart his knees; he liked to feel
 Its steadfast edge clear as his word. . . .'

Here is a complication: in the second of these verses the speaker refers to Lord Roger as if he were another person, while from the opening of the poem we are to infer that Roger is the speaker himself; then again the description of Sir Oliver, the knight with whom he is to fight, has all the air of an old reminiscence, although it is obvious that it must be meant to refer to the time immediately preceding that of the point of speech. With Mr. Morris this want of perspicuity finds its preventive in direct narration, as in *The Haystack in the Floods*. The subject of that poem is not in itself so simple as the other; but, instead of either of the principal actors

being commissioned with the narrative, the whole is given to us in Mr. Morris's own clear objective style. We have perspicuously before us the Knight Robert, with his troop of disaffected men, flying with the Lady Jehane from Paris, where her chastity has been impeached, and she has the dreadful alternative of undergoing trial by fire or water, or living with a man (Godmar) whom she hates. With terrible reality is depicted the wet, woeful, hasty ride to the 'haystack in the floods,' where the fugitives are met by Godmar and his men, outnumbered, and overpowered. Godmar then gives Jehane an hour to consider the alternative of living with him or returning to Paris; she dismounts, and in a state of mental paralysis most graphically described, totters to a heap of hay and sleeps her hour; and

'Being waked at last, sigh'd quietly,
And strangely childlike came, and said:
"I will not." Straightway Godmar's head,
As though it hung on strong wires, turn'd
Most sharply round, and his face burn'd.

For Robert—both his eyes were dry,
He could not weep, but gloomily
He seem'd to watch the rain; yea, too,
His lips were firm; he tried once more
To touch her lips; she reach'd out, sore
And vain desire so tortured them,
The poor grey lips, and now the hem
Of his sleeve brush'd them.

With a start
Up Godmar rose, thrust them apart;
From Robert's throat he loosed the bands
Of silk and mail; with empty hands

Held out, she stood and gazed, and saw
The long bright blade without a flaw
Glide out from Godmar's sheath, his hand
In Robert's hair; she saw him bend
Back Robert's head; she saw him send
The thin steel down; the blow told well,
Right backward the knight Robert fell,
And moan'd as dogs do, being half dead,
Unwitting, as I deem: so then
Godmar turn'd grinning to his men,
Who ran, some five or six, and beat
His head to pieces at their feet.

Then Godmar turn'd again and said:
"So, Jehane, the first fitte is read!
Take note, my lady, that your way
Lies backward to the Chatelet!"
She shook her head and gazed awhile
At her cold hands with a rueful smile,
As though this thing had made her mad.

This was the parting that they had
Beside the haystack in the floods.'

The physiology and psychology in the sketch of Jehane are alike excellent; and an admirable sequence is formed in hurrying her through physical fatigue while under a strain of mental excitement, bringing her suddenly under the dreaded influence of the man she hates (an influence which, with the extreme bodily discomfort of cold and wet, strikes her into a collapse of mind bordering on paralysis), cancelling her mind for one reactionary hour in a dreamless sleep from which she wakes with the settled determination not to be Godmar's, tearing from her under horrible circumstances her chief tie to life, and leaving her to face unaided the frightful

danger from which she was escaping with Robert. Such a sequence as this would be likely to have but one issue; and accordingly poor Jehane is left before us gazing childishly at her hands, the terrible strain of body and mind having already set into the devastating current of madness.

It is probable that, were Mr. Morris treating a similar subject to this now, we should miss a certain fierceness that exists in it as matters stand; and equally probable it is that had the little drama of *Sir Peter Harpdon's End** been conceived in these later days of his poetic activity, we should have been spared the portrait of such an unmitigated beast as the Lambert of that piece—for the later volumes show a rare taste in eliminating all that is revolting in the delightful region of old romance. *Sir Peter Harpdon's End* is an excessively clever little play in five scenes; but it falls as short of dramatic excellence as the monologues fall short of technical excellence in their kind.

In *The Life and Death of Jason* the poet has caught the true spirit of the Greeks, so that except for the evidence of language and method, the reader might think he was reading the work of a genuine Greek narrator—notwithstanding anachronisms found in the book, both in relation to special facts and in matters of general custom. In this

* *Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, p. 67, et seq.

almost entirely open-air poem, we follow Jason and his companions about over the world with a full, fresh, delicious sense of space and health and beauty; and we never have to think of these men as mean or low by reason of their creed or actions: they are simply big-souled adventurers, not to be daunted in their search for what the world yields of great and desirable. Mr. Morris is never more at home than when he is out of doors. He seems to revel in nature; and, full as his head must be of old lore, it is difficult to imagine when and where he has found time to acquire it, except by fits and starts in open-air ramblings, for not an elemental trait escapes him when he gets into his landscape vein. Far too fresh are his leafy, woody, airy, sunny scenes to be conceivably the result of a second-hand study; they bear the impress of nature directly on them; and it is nearly as impossible to conceive that they are taken from other men's pictures as it would be to believe that Turner's seas, skies, plains, and rivers, were taken from anything but naked nature, or that Michelangelo attained his anatomical splendour by an abstruse study of the *Quattrocentisti*. The poet who wrote the description of a storm in the first book of *Jason* (pp. 13, 14) must have studied out in the broad air, and deep in the woods, and down on the river beds, with head unpropped by any student's hand, and with leave to lounge open-eyed, open-

eared, drinking in the beauties of prospect and sound fresh from the springs of nature. Even the anachronism of shifting vanes on town spires has a thoughtless naturalness in it which we should not have got in a made-up picture, and insidiously prompts one to suspect that this noble sketch of a storm near 'the Greek sea, so many years ago,' was never conceived a hundred miles away from 'the rose-hung lanes of woody Kent.' A mere dashing truthfulness in verbal landscape-painting, however, would not serve for the treatment of a subject such as the life and death of Jason : that is merely one of the needful qualifications, and of the rest, the most essential is that tender, guileless, slightly reflective, almost pagan tone of mind rarely met with in modern times. This Mr. Morris has beyond everybody; and without this his *Jason* would never have been the creation it is.

To show in detail how the poet has kept the whole of this old subject fresh, notwithstanding the greatness of his predecessors in treating it, would be out of the question; but that he has done so is certain. Whether we read of Phineus and the harpies or of Hylas and the nymphs, of the flight of Phryxus and Helle on the gold-fleeced ram, or of the passage of the Symplegades—whether we linger with the poet over Medea's visit to Circe or pass with him by the shallows of the Syrens—all is fragrant, fresh, and in-

stinct with originality as well as pagan fidelity. And in the greatest occasions the poet rises highest, thus keeping well along the level of his subject. The two capital situations are the taking of the fleece from the dragon-guarded temple, and that defection of Jason from his allegiance to Medea leading him into a spoiled existence that only ends with his death. Nearly half the materials are used in building the story up to the point whereat, through Medea's helpful love, he obtains the fleece; and with the other half the downward slope to his early death is symmetrically constructed.

The conception of Medea is daring and powerful: the austere sorceress of the popular idea is here subdued to an exquisitely tender maiden with much strength of character; and the latent fierceness of her nature is shown in cunning touches throughout the early parts of her story. The scene in the temple, before the charming of the dragon, is very fine, and in the following little speech there is great beauty and significance: 'Think,' cries Medea,

'How sweet a cup I have been used to drink,
And how I cast it to the ground for thee.
Upon the day thou weariest of me,
I wish that thou mayst somewhat think of this,
And 'twixt thy new-found kisses, and the bliss
Of something sweeter than thine old delight,
Remember thee a little of this night
Of marvels, and this starlit, silent place,
And these two lovers standing face to face.'

Coming at the point where Jason's love and his quest are about to be blended in one success, and foreshadowing the downfall of his love, this is highly artistic; and we get a taste of Medea's potential fierceness when, on board Argo with the fleece, she urges the adventurers to hasten the work of running down the ship of her brother Absyrtus. This luckless prince falls by Jason's spear; and herein is one of Mr. Morris's excellent modifications: had Medea reddened her hand with a brother's blood at this point, as in the orthodox version, we must have lost interest in her; but as the tale stands we are able to regard her as a fair specimen of crafty antique womanhood, undeprived of the grace of sweet maidenliness. *Gratuitous* ferocity is no part of this conception of Medea, even when we pass from the *Life* to the *Death* of Jason, wherein there is no essential change in hero or heroine; and in this last division of the work it is no small thing that is accomplished in so bringing about the grim vengeance of Medea that the reader cannot find in his heart much beside pity for the injured Queen.

The germ of Jason's falseness to Medea lay in that same restless spirit that sent him to Colchis after the fleece: bold and headstrong, he could not withstand the temptation which King Creon threw in his way in the tender maiden Glauce, any more than, ten years before, he had been able to withstand the

temptation held up by King Pelias in the golden fleece. The whole of the last book, depicting his fall from allegiance to Medea, and his fading life after her vengeance and departure, is magnificent. His mere death immediately after his treachery would scarcely have been affecting; but Mr. Morris restores him to his healthy love of great emprise and to something of his old love for Medea, and thus renders his premature death highly pathetic. Lying in the dark shadow of his beached Argo, looking across the sea, he broods on his inactivity since the loss of Glauce; and bringing together the ruins of the past he begins to build with them into the future, and to hope that Medea, hearing of new exploits, may come and seek him on his lonely throne. In this fine frame of mind he lapses into sleep—his last sleep; for as he lies the fated beam falls from Argo and crushes him with his new aspirations.

The plan of *The Earthly Paradise* recalls that of *The Canterbury Tales*; but the younger book is far more symmetrical in form than the elder, and much more finished in workmanship, as far as one can compare on that head. The plan is this:—In the days of Geoffery Chaucer ‘certain gentlemen and mariners of Norway, having considered all that they had heard of the Earthly Paradise, set sail to find it, and after many troubles and the lapse of many years came old men to some Western land, of which they had

never before heard: there they died, when they had dwelt there certain years, much honoured of the strange people;’ but before they die they join twice a month in festivals appointed by the ‘land’s chief priest,’ at each of which some tale is told. This arrangement makes a certain limit to the length of the tales absolutely necessary; *Jason* far exceeds the limit of which tales so told could possibly be got through; and it is lucky that the poet has not forced it into the larger book in a clipped form; for we cannot spare any of it. In another great poem Mr. Morris has gone far beyond his usual limits and yet included the result in *The Earthly Paradise*—I mean *The Lovers of Gudrun*; and in treating the subject of Bellerophon he has divided his tale into two, *Bellerophon at Argos* and *Bellerophon in Lycia*. But there is one poem in the collection which seems to have been a little injured by constraint as to dimensions. *The Story of Cupid and Psyche* carries us through a fairy-land of fragrant myth, depicted with exquisite naïveté and just that beautiful degree of minute objectivity, which is not too minute. This fairy-land is occupied by a thoroughly human-hearted little Psyche, of sweet and tender beauty; and, as we follow her with eager interest through the various trials and reverses she has to undergo for love’s sake, we cannot but feel that we are working on and on to a noteworthy apotheosis. Tenderly and lingeringly as each detail of

her trials is dwelt upon, after her short bliss between two stages of misery, we await a counterbalancing minuteness in the setting forth of that great triumph wherein Father Jove confers immortality upon her. After we have seen her through the last hazardous task imposed by the envious Venus, we are not prepared for the immediate termination of the story; but at that point it is already the longest of the first twelve tales; and, although things would seem to be tending to a further development, we have merely an abstract of the Olympic proceedings which close the history. This is unfortunate, because the story has an admirable undercurrent of significance: the apotheosis of Psyche is the triumph of love; her trials are the proverbial 'rough course;' and the shortening down of the apotheosis gives this, the unfavourable side of love, too great a preponderance over the triumph; so that we actually leave the tale with the sense of discomfort in Psyche's sorrows only half washed away—the impression of the sorrows conveyed in the minutely objective manner being too strong to leave the mind in the absence of an antidote of equal minuteness and objectivity. When we look at the faculty Mr. Morris has for finishing off everything, the instinct he displays in leaving no jagged ends of half-told story, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that *The Story of Cupid and Psyche* was compressed at the close on account of the mere exigencies of

plan. This finishing instinct is shown in many little touches indicating unwillingness to lose any opportunity for a pleasurable detail. In *Cupid and Psyche* it happens that the Phoenix comes in on one occasion as a part of the tale's machinery, to find Psyche lying in a state of bewitchment; and, inasmuch as he does a good thing, he has several lines devoted to the winding up of his story:

'And there she would have lain for evermore,
A marble image on the shadowy shore
In outward seeming, but within oppressed
With torments, knowing neither hope nor rest.
But as she lay the Phoenix flew along
Going to Egypt, and knew all her wrong,
And pitied her, beholding her sweet face,
And flew to Love and told him of her case;
And Love, in guerdon of the tale he told,
Changed all the feathers of his neck to gold,
And he flew on to Egypt glad at heart. . . .'

This is quite near the end of the poem; and when we find the very Phoenix so tenderly dealt with, we may justly feel a little chagrin at having to forego any beautiful detail of Psyche's apotheosis—the triumph of love.

In another of the Greek subjects, *The Doom of King Acrisius*, we cannot too greatly admire the ease and grace with which the whole subject, from the girlhood of Danaë to the death of Perseus, is brought into a poem rather less in length than *Cupid and Psyche*. The poem shows great care and forethought in the laying out; and in it we get a specimen of

what is by no means unimportant in Mr. Morris's Greek tales,—his great delicacy in treating when necessary those amours of the gods, so coarsely and barely set forth in orthodox prose accounts. In the usual version of this tale, we are told that Danaë, confined in a brazen tower by her father, on account of a prediction that her offspring would slay him, excited the desire of Jove, by whom she had a son, after the god had entered her chamber as a shower of gold. Now Mr. Morris, without depriving the miracle of an iota of its marvellousness, yet presents the legend in a refined form, by bringing in the rape of Danaë as a link in the chain of Fate, that essentially pagan conception. Venus discovers the maiden imprisoned, hastens to Jove to communicate the fact, and concludes—

“ And great dishonour is it to us all
That ill upon a guiltless head should fall
To save a King from what we have decreed.
Now, therefore, tell me, shall his impious deed
Save him alive, while she that might have borne
Great kings and glorious heroes, lives forlorn
Of love's delight, in solitude and woe?”

Then said the Thunderer, “ Daughter, nowise so
Shall this be in the end; heed what shall fall,
And let none think that any brazen wall
Can let the Gods from doing what shall be.”

Such an arrangement of circumstances might or might not have been adopted by an unscrupulous worker in mythological material, but the pointed use made of it by Mr. Morris has the effect of refining very greatly

the love-scene between Jove and Danaë. When it comes in the course of the tale's development, we find it purified of all barbaric warmth,—a specimen of Greek legend, retaining all its child-like freshness, but overlaid with an exquisite delicacy new to its fabric :

‘There on the sill she laid her slender hand,
And looking seaward, pensive did she stand,
And seemed as though she waited for the sun
To bring her news her misery was done;
At last he came and over the green sea
His golden road shone out right gloriously,
And into Danaë's face his glory came
And lit her softly waving hair like flame.
But in his light she held out both her hands,
As though he brought her from some far-off lands
Healing for all her great distress and woe.

But yellower now the sunbeams seemed to grow
Not whiter as their wont is, and she heard
A tinkling sound that made her, half afraid,
Draw back a little from the fresh green sea,
Then to a clang the noise rose suddenly,
And gently was she smitten on the breast,
And some bright thing within her palm did rest,
And trickled down her shoulder and her side,
And on her limbs a little did abide,
Or lay upon her feet a little while.

Then in her face increased the doubtful smile,
While o'er her eyes a drowsy film there came,
And in her cheeks a flush as if of shame,
And, looking round about, could she behold
The chamber scattered o'er with shining gold,
That grew, till ankle-deep she stood in it.

Then through her limbs a tremor did there flit
As through white water runs the summer wind,
And many a wild hope came into her mind,
But her knees bent and soft she sank down there,
And on the gold was spread her golden hair,
And like an ivory image still she lay,
Until the night again had hidden day.

But when again she lifted up her head,
She found herself laid soft within her bed,
While midmost of the room the taper shone,
And all her damsels from the place were gone,
And by her head a gold-robed man there stood,
At sight of whom the damsel's shamefast blood
Made all her face red to the golden hair,
And quick she covered up her bosom fair.

Then in a great voice said he, "Danaë,
Sweet child, be glad, and have no fear of me,
And have no shame, nor hide from thy new love
The breast that on this day has pillowed Jove. . . ."

How exquisite is the touch of colour by which the miracle receives its first introduction (the fault of tone in the sunbeams), and with what delicate gradations is the god developed from that first touch! And at the end of the scene we get a couplet of the greatest poetic suggestiveness—the concise, significant statement of the objective miraculous fact which confirmed to Danaë the marvellous story just told to her by the god:

'Then forth he sprang and o'er the sea did fly
And loud it thundered from a clondless sky.'

This is so admirable a climax to the episode that it leaves the reader happy in regard to the state of Danaë's mind—assured that the godship of her guest was sufficiently evident to her to turn her arid and dreary brazen prison to a paradise of hope and present joy in hope. Accordingly we meet with precisely the aspect of things we are prepared for when, in opening the next section of the story, the poet tells us that

‘when her damsels came to her next day . . . they found her singing o’er a web of silk.’

A masterly power in introducing gods and goddesses is one striking quality in these poems: the instance just given is not an isolated one; but with all the variety of circumstances there is an invariable success for which an uniform good method is to thank. Without any violence of apparition or unseemly suddenness of transformation, the supernatural machinery is yet so arranged at all times that gods appear and vanish in the most convenient manner. The poet has in fact a way of melting these divinities, as it were, into the fabric of his tales and out of it again; and his method is entirely one of objectivity. There are physical symptoms of approach and physical symptoms of recent presence in each case of a divine visitation. It is so in the sample just given, and it is again so at a later stage of the same tale when Perseus meets Minerva. He walks on the beach, while the western sky is still yellow with recent sunset, and talks with an ‘ancient woman’ whom he encounters, concerning the winning of the Gorgon’s head, which he has undertaken. This crone, after hearing all his tale, is transformed under the waxing moonlight, and Perseus recognises, in the series of her newly-shown accoutrements, the attributes of the mighty Pallas, who instructs him how to proceed, and gives him arms for the quest: the

reality of the apparition is attested by the shining of the moon on these as they lie on the sand after the goddess has gone. Another exquisite instance is in *Atalanta's Race*, wherein Milanion wins the terrible fleet beauty by an appeal to Venus. In the plea of Milanion we get also a beautiful instance of overlaying of refined motive : he pours forth his soul to the goddess, beseeching her to consider that he seeks the hand of Atalanta for love alone, and not for riches or kingdom—making no doubt that the failure of those who have fallen in racing with her for her love has arisen from dividedness of motive. Venus comes to him propitiously ; and this is the manner of her coming :

‘ Then he turned round ; not for the sea-gull’s cry
That wheeled above the temple in his flight,
Not for the fresh south wind that lovingly
Breathed on the new-born day and dying night,
But some strange hope ’twixt fear and great delight
Drew round his face, now flushed, now pale and wan,
And still constrained his eyes the sea to scan.

Now a faint light lit up the southern sky,
Not sun or moon, for all the world was grey,
But this a bright cloud seemed, that drew anigh,
Lighting the dull waves that beneath it lay
As toward the temple still it took its way,
And still grew greater, till Milanion
Saw nought for dazzling light that round him shone.

But as he staggered with his arms outspread,
Delicious unnamed odours breathed around,
For languid happiness he bowed his head,
And with wet eyes sank down upon the ground,
Nor wished for aught, nor any dream he found
To give him reason for that happiness,
Or make him ask more knowledge of his bliss.

At last his eyes were cleared, and he could see
Through happy tears the goddess face to face
With that faint image of Divinity,
Whose well-wrought smile and dainty changeless grace
Until that morn so gladdened all the place;
Then he, unwitting cried aloud her name
And covered up his eyes for fear and shame.'

She then gives him the three apples, whose charmed attractiveness is to divert Atalanta from the course when the race is being run; and, after ending her speech of instruction, she is melted out just as exquisitely as she was melted in :

' Milanion raised his head at this last word
For now so soft and kind she seemed to be
No longer of her Godhead was he feared;
Too late he looked, for nothing could he see
But the white image glimmering doubtfully
In the departing twilight cold and grey,
And those three apples on the steps that lay.'

But perhaps the most perfect example of manipulation of godship is in *The Love of Alcestis*,—the exit of Apollo after he has served King Admetus as shepherd for a year. The parting is at sunset, on a hill where there is yet brilliant sunlight, though 'all the eastern vale was grey and cold.' Arrived at the hill-top, Apollo reveals himself to Admetus, and after bending on him 'one godlike changed look,' takes farewell of him, assuring him of future favour. 'A friend,' he says,

"This year has won thee who shall never fail :
But now indeed, for nought will it avail
To say what I may have in store for thee,
Of gifts that men desire; let these things be,

And live thy life, till death itself shall come,
And turn to nought the storehouse of thine home,
Then think of me ; these feathered shafts behold,
That here have been the terror of the wold,
Take these, and count them still the best of all
Thy envied wealth, and when on thee shall fall
By any way the worst extremity,
Call upon me before thou com'st to die,
And lay these shafts with incense on a fire,
That thou may'st gain thine uttermost desire."

He ceased, but ere the golden tongue was still
An odorous mist had stolen up the hill,
And to Admetus first the god grew dim,
And then was but a lovely voice to him,
And then at last the sun had sunk to rest,
And a fresh wind blew lightly from the west
Over the hill-top, and no soul was there ;
But the sad dying autumn field-flowers fair
Rustled dry leaves about the windy place,
Where even now had been the godlike face,
And in their midst the brass-bound quiver lay.'

The first instalment of *The Earthly Paradise*, at some of the contents of which we have been looking, has now been divided into two 'Parts,' and in the two remaining parts, issued later, there are certain fresh characteristics. Although I have only mentioned specially some of the Greek tales in the earlier half, the space is in fact divided between Greek and medieval subjects. The medieval tales, told by the 'wanderers,' include some of the most admirable things in the collection, as, for instance, *The Proud King*, and specially *The Man born to be King*. But it is to be noted that these medieval tales are Germanic in character. Between the issue of Parts I. and II. and the issue of Part III. Mr. Morris was engaged

in studying Icelandic literature, and while obtaining from that source one or two subjects far more nearly primeval than the medieval tales referred to above, he also seems to have acquired a taste for a somewhat closer treatment of human motive,—though of course it would be entirely foreign to the nature of his fully-developed genius to go into minute intricacies and obscurities. Some querulous critic was grumbling at him awhile ago for wasting his time over these sagas, whereof he has translated three, those of Grettir the Strong, Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue, and the Volsungs. Other men, it was said, could translate those; whereas no other could finish *The Earthly Paradise*. But in the first place, taking for granted linguistic ability, of all men qualified to render the old Norse tongue into English, there is probably not one who could furnish so thorough a rendering of the word and spirit of a saga; and secondly, the inevitable communion of the poet's soul with the souls of the sagamen of old has had a valuable influence on the very *Earthly Paradise* supposed to be harmfully kept in abeyance by the labours of translation. Assuming that we are not so far gone on the road to perfect civilisation, but that some of us may yet find pleasure and profit in a fresh old story or so of vivid adventure and real home-life, told much as a sagaman might have told it, then the translation of this sort of literature is a good work,

varying in excellence with the excellence of the reproduction only. And it is no great assumption to assume more than this; for the years that are piling our 'culture' about us are also widening the conviction that 'precious is the soul of man to man,' and so increasing the estimated value of works which yield us clear notions of what life physical and intellectual was among any our far-off predecessors, and of what found favour in their sight as worthy matter for poetry, or a prose form of presentation commensurate in its influences with poetry proper. A saga, then, claims respect in its kind as importunately as an Iliad or an Odyssey, an Imitation of Christ or a Divine Comedy; and the translation of a saga most to be desired is that which, besides possessing the greatest essential faithfulness, smacks least of terms suggesting modern thoughts. To secure essential faithfulness, in so far as it can be secured by Icelandic scholarship, Mr. Morris wisely associated himself in his saga-labours with Mr. Magnússon; and there is no second writer of refinement who writes English as free from the barbarisms of civilisation as the English wherein the history of Jason, and the collected tales of *The Earthly Paradise*, are told by Mr. Morris. The language of those poems has, as an essential part of its beauty, a great primitiveness, and a freshness coextensive with the young-world freshness of the things narrated; and these are the

qualities of mind and language which alone would avail to make a modern English translation of a saga anything like in nature to a work of art. Except for a certain innate delicacy of refinement—a subtlety of refinement imposed upon Mr. Morris by his descent through many good ages, however much he may yearn *through* those ages to the remoter past—except for an easy unstrained avoidance of all the coarsenesses of the younger world—Mr. Morris has, in his poetry, so completely merged his modernness in sympathy with the times he has depicted, that we have an excellent guarantee for his capacity to enter thoroughly into the spirit of the times of Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue and Grettir the Strong, and of the sagamen who put the doings of those times on record, and rejoiced to tell the tale of Sigurd Fafnir's-bane. Opposite the title-page of his *Grettis Saga*, Mr. Morris has inscribed a beautiful and noble-spirited sonnet—the two quatrains expository of a sad-faced and tender paganism, and the terminal sestet embodying somewhat of the poet's inevitable modern refinement of idea on the same subject :

‘ A life scarce worth the living, a poor fame
Scarce worth the winning, in a wretched land,
Where fear and pain go upon either hand,
As toward the end men fare without an aim
Unto the dull grey dark from whence they came :
Let them alone, the unshadowed sheer rocks stand
Over the twilight graves of that poor band,
Who count so little in the great world's game !

Nay, with the dead I deal not; this man lives,
And that which carried him through good and ill,
Stern against fate while his voice echoed still
From rock to rock, now he lies silent, strives
With wasting time, and through its long lapse gives
Another friend to me, life's void to fill.'

But there is no need of such evidence as this to prove the whole-hearted friendliness with which the fortunes of Grettir have been followed closely by the poet, and put into his own tongue. An almost exuberant sympathy with the hero of the saga appears and reappears in every chapter of the volume, in some deftly-turned simplicity or vigorous piece of narration of vigorous proceedings.

Many readers might perhaps find the story of Grettir dry, on account of the entire absence of anything that would nowadays be recognised as 'sentiment.' Grettir's dealings with women are confined to one incident which, though amusing, is neither romantic nor edifying; and the only love-passages that lend an interest to the book for such readers are in the foreign matter introduced into the saga in a late stage of its development—the loves of the Lady Spes and Thorstein Dromund, the brother and avenger of Grettir the Strong. These passages, some of which are identical with passages in the romance of Tristram, are a serious disturbance of the saga's bleak bracing atmosphere; and certainly the dextrous and delicate hand of one of the trans-

lators might have eliminated the excrecent parts with advantage to us and to the saga too.

He who is disposed to accept Mr. Morris's introduction to saga-literature, and feels the lack of sentiment in *Grettla*, should turn for a different idea to the beautiful little *Saga of Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue and Rafn the Skald*—a piece pervaded by an exquisite sentiment, with a far larger element of intellectual life than the *Story of Grettir* has, and free from any such blot as that just alluded to: if he be not then bitten with a taste for these things, let him there rest from his labour, for mere labour it will be. But if the reverse be the case, a rich treat will be in store for him in the noble *Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs*, the northern and parent form of the *Nibelungen Lied*. Here he will find sentiment enough and romance enough—flashes of a weird magnificence that all the ice-hills of the Land of Ice have not been able to overreach with their long dusk shadows, and that all the 'cold grey sea' that rings the island of Thule has not washed free of its colour and heat. The marvels of this marvellous story are strongly upborne by the only firm pillars art has ever had—those, namely, whose bases are fixed in the utterly real, and whose capitals reach the topmost heights of the imaginative and ideal. The science of human souls shown in the general conception of the book, and the particular conception of each character, is perfect and deep and piercing—al-

beit those characters do not depart from the simplicity of primitive people; and, although the presence of the sexual element lacking in *Grettir* gives a certain thrill of interest that that has not, yet the life depicted in the two pieces is of the same primeval stamp; and the ensemble of these pictures of our fathers as they were serves to place vividly before us the fact that human passion is now much what it was then, for all the lapse of centuries and growth of refinements.

Sigurd Fafnir's-bane (the Siegfried of the *Nibelungen Lied*) is not the rough character that *Grettir* is: he is not behind him in readiness to kill enemies, and so on; but there is a certain courtliness about him without the dishonesty of the court, and a comeliness without the effeminacy of the polished produce of later times. *Grettir* is a brute, but a noble brute; Sigurd is noble, but not a brute by a long way; and yet I confess that the one fierce headstrong savage of the *Grettis Saga* seems to me a greater conception, artistically, than Sigurd or any other man of *Völsunga*. As a work, however, this latter must carry the palm from its more grisly rival, for the variety's sake of its incidents and characters, and for the strength's sake of the finer feelings treated in it and ignored in the other. The one figure of the warrior-woman Brynhild, so mere a woman for all her king-slayings and war-deeds, is priceless; and the working-out of the final crash—full of passion and

death and disaster—is a thing not often surpassed in any literature.

It cannot be doubted that, though the reading public may require time for the appreciation of these works, appreciated they will ultimately be; for the interest of them is too genuine, and the class of labour bestowed on them by Mr. Morris too high, to admit of any ultimate failure of recognition. The Eddaic Songs translated and appended to the *Völ-sunga* volume are very fine. Mr. Morris has doubtless done well to render these early poems in short irregular unrhymed stanzas, if stanzas they are to be called; and he has, without loss of ease and simplicity, given a good sprinkling of the alliterations which the Icelandic poets used for the adornment of their verse. His renderings of periphrastic expressions, too, have a peculiar excellence; and, though this be the case, the finest of all the poems is peculiarly free from such expressions, probably by reason of the great earnestness of that poem's depicted sorrow and the intense reality and simplicity of the whole scene. This is a poem inserted by the translators as chapter xxxi. of the saga: it treats 'of the lamentation of Gudrun [Sigurd's wife] over Sigurd dead, as it is told in the ancient songs.' Some portions of it are very musical, as for instance this that occurs twice—

'Naught gat Gudrun
Of wail or greeting,
So heavy was she

For her dead husband,
So dreadful-hearted
For the King laid dead there.'

And there is an exquisite feeling in the two stanzas following that wherein it is told that Gullrond 'swept the sheet away from Sigurd, and turned his' cheek toward his wife's knees,' in order to 'get greeting' for her after other means had failed :

' Once looked Gudrun—
One look only,
And saw her lord's locks
Lying all bloody,
The great man's eyes
Glazed and deadlly,
And his heart's bulwark
Broken by sword-edge.

Back then sank Gudrun,
Back on the bolster,
Loosed was her head array,
Red did her cheeks grow,
And the rain-drops ran
Down over her knees.'

It is easy to tell up on one's fingers the thoroughly great translations of alien works into our tongue; and this must continue to be the case, for only now and then does an original contributor to a noble literature care to give his time to the reproduction of any fragment of another literature; and only men capable of noble original artistic efforts have, in completeness, the right vein of capacity for passing a thing of beauty from an alien language into their own. Among the few great translations we have, these sagas will take their place—ranking

doubtless, for perfection in their kind and for permanence of interest, with Mr. Rossetti's *Early Italian Poets*, with Mrs. Browning's *Prometheus Bound*, and with some two or three translations of earlier production.

The assimilation of saga-spirit into the fabric of *The Earthly Paradise* cannot but be a gain to a work owning as crowning virtues directness of thought and narration, and freshness of out-door atmosphere; and *The Lovers of Gudrun*, the chief piece in Part III., shows how admirably the poet has taken in the whole method of saga-telling, condensed it, overlaid it with certain beauties something above the saga standard of decoration, and given it out again as an unmistakable section of the *Paradise*, yet embodying somewhat of matter and manner not found in former sections.

The general laying out of *The Lovers of Gudrun*, a story taken from the *Laxdæla Saga*, corresponds with the laying out of the sagas wherewith Mr. Morris has enriched our literature by direct prose translation. It opens by introducing us to the two families mainly concerned in the action, and principally to Kiartan the son of Olaf the Peacock, Bodli the son of Thorleik and cousin of Kiartan, and Gudrun the daughter of Oswif. Then, as in the *Gunnlaug Saga*, a dream is introduced (Gudrun's, this one) and prophetically interpreted. The interpreter,

Guest the Wise, then prophesies concerning Kiartan and Bodli. Next Gudrun fulfils a portion of the first prophecy by marrying a man whom she soon leaves on account of his ill-treatment of her, and another portion by taking a second husband, who is shortly afterwards drowned. It is now that the important part of the history begins: Kiartan, reputed to be the noblest youth of Iceland, woos Gudrun, is betrothed to her, and, after much happiness in her society, goes unmarried with Bodli to seek adventure in Norway, where King Olaf Tryggvison is busy propagating Christianity at the sword's point. No sooner are they leaving Iceland than Bodli finds to his desperation that he too loves Gudrun; but he harbours at first no thought of trying to win her from Kiartan, whom he regards as something more than a brother. They are made welcome by King Olaf, and Kiartan soon betakes himself to paying attention to Ingibiorg, the king's sister, who becomes enamoured of him. He finds her very charming, and seems to have forgotten Gudrun, the while poor Bodli's feelings are more and more entangled by the memory of this Icelandic Helen; and at length Bodli goes back to Iceland, bearing a hot heart, and a message from Kiartan sufficiently cool in tone. After a short fierce period of irresolution, he makes Gudrun understand that Kiartan is to wed Ingibiorg, and woos his cousin's betrothed for himself. She accepts him, and shortly

after their marriage Kiartan returns to fulfil his pledge. Then it comes out that, for all his desire to rove, and his seeming carelessness of his old love while with Ingibiorg, he is in truth passionately attached to Gudrun. His life is spoiled, cannot be repaired by his marriage with Refna, a second maid who falls in love with him, and troublous times ensue for all—ending with the death of Kiartan by Bodli's sword, and the slaying of Bodli by Kiartan's family. Thus is another part of Guest's forecast accomplished; and for the rest, Gudrun, after long mourning, marries a fourth husband, whom also she outlives to become a blind and sad old woman, with an elderly son.

Such is the outline of the tale: saga literature yielded Mr. Morris his material and the manner of laying out, and introduced a fresh element of freshness into his book; but no saga afforded him the tender refinement with which Gudrun, Ingibiorg, and Refna are drawn, the largeness with which the fierce and fond elements of Gudrun's character are brought out, or the subtlety wherewith Bodli, the Agonistes of the piece, is depicted in his severe nobility, dashed with a single red streak of perfidy—in his complex combination of strong purpose and weak yielding to temptation. Bodli is the profoundest conception Mr. Morris has given us; he is a man of an exceedingly fine nature, of intense warmth in his affections, and, when led to indulge his passion for Gudrun at the

expense of his friend, he bids good-bye for ever to happiness, and knows he has done so—his very nobility of nature crushing his heart with remorse at the one perfidy into which he has fallen. He honestly believes that he loves Gudrun better than Kiartan does; and even in that belief he can get no solace from a marriage brought about by a betrayal of his friend, though that friend looked very much like a man who meant to betray his love. The utter unsatisfaction of Bodli after he has put hope away from Gudrun's heart is finely drawn: he cannot rest away from her, and he is miserable with her.

‘So time wore,
And still he went to Bathstead more and more,
And whiles alone, and whiles in company,
With raging heart her sad face did he see,
And still the time he spent in hall and bower
Beside her did he call the evillest hour
Of all the day, the while it dured; but when
He was away, came hope's ghost back again
And fanned his miserable longing, till
He said within himself that naught was ill
Save that most hideous load of loneliness.
Howso the time went, never rest did bless
His heart a moment.’

Marriage, however, appears to have been a matter of course in those days; and Gudrun's obvious line of conduct, on conviction that the noblest youth of Iceland was not, as supposed, at her disposal, was to take the man at her feet, recognised as the next noblest, and get what happiness she might from a union based on a one-sided love. But not a suspicion

of joy to either man or woman arises from the partnership contracted under these sombre conditions. 'A dismal wedding!' says the poet—

' Every ear at strain
Some sign of things that were to be to gain;
A guard on every tongue lest some old name
Should set the poisoned smouldering pile aflame. . . .

But if 'neath all folk's eyes things went e'en so,
How would it be then with the hapless two
The morrow of that feast? This I know well,
That upon Bodli the last gate of hell
Seemed shut at last, and no more like a star
Far off perchance, yet bright however far,
Shone hope of better days; yet he lived on,
And soon indeed, the worst of all being won,
And gleams of frantic pleasure therewithal,
A certain quiet on his soul did fall,
As though he saw the end and waited it.
But over Gudrun changes wild would flit,
And sometimes stony would she seem to be;
And sometimes would she give short ecstasy
To Bodli with a fit of seeming love;
And sometimes, as repenting sore thereof,
Silent the live-long day would sit and stare,
As though she knew some ghost were drawing near,
And ere it came with all the world must break,
That she might lose no word it chanced to speak.'

And so matters go hideously on, until Kiartan's coming back and marrying Refna drive Gudrun frantic with sorrow at having missed the man who has really loved her, and whom she most loves, rage with the husband through whose agency the miscarriage of her happiness has chanced, and jealousy of the woman who has apparently inherited the affection once for her alone. Under Mr. Morris's treatment it

is of course through no coarse and brutal enmity between his dioscursi that the catastrophe comes about, but through the fervid torrent of Gudrun's love being diverted into a channel of temporary hate, and fed and irritated by the 'fierce dull sons of Oswif,' ever jealous of Kiartan, Bodli, and the rest of Olaf's household. The soul which the poet has put in Bodli is far superior to the wreaking of animal hatred on his betrayed friend; and Kiartan, though a much simpler study in psychology, is no less noble than Bodli, so no more capable of low hate. Kiartan's is one of those large and liberal natures occasionally seen blended with such great personal attractiveness, that every one, man or woman, is more or less subject to the easy, princely, unassuming ascendancy of the person so endowed. These rare souls, being courted and made much of wherever they go, have no need to take life otherwise than easily; and it remains an open question to bystanders how much sterling nobility such natures really hold, until some dire dilemma brings out the truth at bottom of the soul. Kiartan, a man fitted eminently for a large simple life of success, might never have shown greatness or smallness but for Bodli's perfidy; and when these two fine fellows are thrown into collision on the swirl of the current of Gudrun's fierce love, that would fain consume the thing loved for very hell of jealousy, each desires only to fall by the other's sword—Bodli

advancing his blade to meet the parry and retort of Kiartan, and Kiartan throwing down his arms unexpectedly to take in his breast the sword of Bodli, long since cursed as the bane of Olaf the Peacock's stock. The culminating refinement of the poet upon saga barbarism comes in the magnificent pathos of Bodli's speech over his dead rival.

In Part IV. of this great work we still find Mr. Morris's delicacy and good sense powerful to keep him away from all doubtful subjects; and the complete mastery the years of his labour have given him over romantic method, as well as over the instruments he has selected for use, and the noble Saxon-English that he writes as fluently as if our language contained no composite barbarisms, suffice to render everything he does more or less a master-piece. Still, for master-pieces in the extreme sense of the word, one would go to Part III. rather than to either of the other Parts, for in neither division is there any one poem that approaches *The Lovers of Gudrun* in point of breadth, depth, and grandeur, or any one poem comparable with *The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon* in point of exquisite sustained imagination and what may be called the *Shelleyan* singing faculty. I must guard myself carefully against misunderstanding: of each and all of these poems I think highly; but *The Lovers of Gudrun* has no equal in Chaucer, and is therefore unrivalled as a poetic romance;

whilst, as regards the word *Shelleyan*, I simply use it because I conceive Shelley to be the typical singer of the English tongue—the man whose utterances are most completely and musically dissevered from prose—and not because there is any faintest likeness between the ultra-liberal modern mystic and the unmodern reveller in the halls of ancient and medieval romance.

The chief thing to note in the fourth Part is the introduction of two tales representing that period when pagan creeds were so blended with men's christianity as to give countenance to legends wherein the pagan deities bore an actual part in the transactions. *The Ring given to Venus* is founded on a tradition which William of Malmesbury tells, with all the simplicity of medieval credulity, as an authentic narrative concerning a young nobleman of Rome. But while the two pages that the legend occupies in the chronicler's volume* reek of that region described by Canon Kingsley as Old-wives'-fabledom, the poem built by Mr. Morris on that so slender material has no smack whatever of the ridiculous, and is, indeed, one of the most remarkable of his productions in some respects. One or two grossly offensive features, preserved by William of Malmesbury, Mr. Morris has rejected, filling in with material of his own far fitter for the purposes of a tale illustrating so curious a

* Bohn's Antiquarian Library.

phase of belief as this one does,—the idea of the continued existence of the gods of Greece and Rome under degraded circumstances. The men who set afloat this story, christian men though they must have been, at least in profession, appear to have regarded the pagan deities as the living though vanquished enemies of God, and to have had faith in the possibility of these enthralled rulers of the antique world achieving, with the assistance of wicked necromancy, somewhat to assert their old power. Here we have a narrative of a newly-married youth placing his spousal ring on the finger of a bronze statue of Venus, which bronze statue closes its finger on the ring, and afterwards causes it to disappear altogether; and it is only through the agency of a magician priest that the young man gets his ring back—not from the statue, but from the very goddess! For, going by night to a place indicated by the magician, he sees go by in a wondrous pageant the gods of the old world, and many companies of men and women long dead; and finally he meets the *master* of the pageant, who, on receipt of a letter from the priest, sends to Venus and forces her to give back the ring. To those who are disposed to blame Mr. Morris for the implicitness of his apparent paganism, this is clearly a sufficient *amende*; for the master of the Gods of Olympus is the Devil; and this tale of the Olympians in their transitional character of thralls and coadjutors of the

King of Hell is told with just the same implicitness of faith in the manner of narration as the poet has brought to bear on any of the greatest feats of the same deities done in their palmy days. A strange, weird phase of faith, this; known to men as a phase of faith long enough,* but embodied here with something very near akin to solemnity, as witness the agonised utterance of Satan on seeing the well-known seal of the magician; *his* master, permitted by God for a season to exercise an unholy power over him:

'Shall this endure for ever, Lord?
Hast thou no care to keep thy word?
And must such double men abide?
Not mine, not mine, nor on thy side?
For as thou cursest them, I curse:—
Make thy souls better Lord, or worse!'

The Hill of Venus, from the old German legend of Tannhäuser, illustrates again this transitional phase of faith; but the original legend here seems to depend more on a deduction of allegory from a premiss of morality, and less on stupid credulity; for the Venus of the Hill stands up as a superb picture of the 'lusts of the flesh,' arrayed in the utmost beauty that a rank medieval fancy might invest them with; while the knight Walter, who stands in Mr. Morris's poem in the stead of Tannhäuser, wanders

* Tom Moore did a poem on the same subject; and the late M. Prosper Mérimée founded on the legend a tale of modern life combining subtlety and grossness in an extraordinary degree.

in utter discontent until he finds in Venus herself the full embodiment of the sensual qualities he has missed in every woman he has known, and then, after a space of seeming satisfaction, falls gradually from phase to phase of mistrust and fear and self-disgust till he flies headlong from his goddess to seek a field where repentance and reformation are possible. But to this man who has estranged himself from his fellow-men, to become the slave of his senses, no repentance is possible. The infallible remedy of a pilgrimage to Rome is, in his case, fallible; for as he kneels at the very feet of the Pope to confess and be shriven, comes Venus' self between him and his salvation, effacing the images of saint and Madonna, and breathing odours of unholy delicacy between the would-be penitent and the holy man; so that when at last his confession is told out to its ending, all except the name of her who has been his temptress, he has grown to the unbending conviction that his doom is to go back to her. 'What!' he exclaims,

"must I name her, then, ere thou mayst know
What thing I mean? or say where she doth dwell—
A land that new life unto me did show—
Which thou wilt deem a corner cut from Hell,
Set in the world lest all go there too well?
Lo, from THE HILL OF VENUS do I come,
That now henceforth I know shall be my home!"

He sprang up as he spoke, and faced the Pope,
Who through his words had stood there trembling sore,
With doubtful anxious eyes, whence every hope

Failed with that last word; a stern look came o'er
His kind vexed face: "Yea, dwell there evermore!"
He cried: "Just so much hope I have of thee
As on this dry staff fruit and flowers to see!"

We know the end; how the knight went back in despair to his slavery in the Hill of Venus, never to be heard of more, and how the Pope's staff blossomed and bore fruit as a sign that even in so desperate a case as this there was hope. A terrible open question this—whether there is a point of slavery to that hardest of taskmasters, vice, beyond which amendment is impossible! Concerning this ultimate poem I can but add that its difficult subject is handled with such an amount of mastery that it holds its own as the end of a series comprising such good things as are comprised in *The Earthly Paradise*.

The Fostering of Aslaug, a tale taken from the Saga of Ragnar Lodbrog, gives simply and beautifully the history of the hapless infancy and childhood and happy marriage of that daughter that Brynhild bore to Sigurd Fafnir's-bane, before their lives went awry. The ground-work of the poem is identical with that of the story of Cinderella, the traditional maiden whom the Fates are determined to place in her merited high position, notwithstanding the machinations of harsh and oppressive stepmothers. Between this legend and the story of Rhodope there is a noteworthy likeness, quite independent of the grave and stately grace conferred on each of the two heroines.

by Mr. Morris; nor should I omit to mention a certain resemblance between the mere elements of the elaborate fantasy of *Psyche* and her god-lover, and the elements of these simpler tales of *Rhodope* and *Aslaug* and their king-lovers. To some who cannot read the *Saga of Ragnar Lodbrog*, this poem may have an interest beyond its intrinsic interest, when taken as an episode connected with the *Volsung* tale.

The history of *Bellerophon*, in Part IV., is certainly one of the poet's best works. Of the two poems into which for convenience sake it is divided, that which deals with the earlier history of the hero under the title of *Bellerophon at Argos* seems greater than that continuing his adventures under the name of *Bellerophon in Lycia*. Indeed the treatment of Queen *Sthenobœa*, who in the first-named tale plays Potiphar's wife to *Bellerophon's* Joseph, has a fair share of the sweep and grandeur of touch which the poet showed in drawing the far nobler character of *Gudrun*. *Sthenobœa* is a very unlovable character—one in whom vice is made hideous, however lovely her person; and further, the broad poetic justice with which the Greek legend deals death to her as the consequence of her criminal attempt is worked out by the present narrator with much psychologic cunning. Her lonely and terrible death by her own hand, after she has failed in her designs and thinks she has succeeded in taking a

signal vengeance on the wise Bellerophon, is most powerful. Bellerophon's character, too, is made and developed in this tale—admirably made and developed; while, in the story of his Lycian adventures, the materials already worked up become the vehicle for a stirring narrative of events. Then Philonoë, the ultimate reward of the hero's labours—Philonoë, the fair and tender maiden, whose love for the hero inspires her with a greater courage and confidence than any one of the terror-ridden inhabitants of the Lycian city can muster—Philonoë, the pure-hearted and true-hearted, can take no stand beside her evil-hearted sister Sthenobœa as a piece of dramatic craftsmanship, although she is adequately drawn and thoroughly human and real. Again, the Argive King Prætus is one of the most complete and dispassionate renderings of pagan life and thought that Mr. Morris has given us, while the Lycian King Jobates is nothing extraordinary in treatment. In Prætus we can delight, while seeing the good, bad and indifferent of his character: in Jobates we can scarcely delight. In fine the characters of the first tale are played against each other with greater force of deep human interest, and under circumstances exacting a greater measure of the artist's best powers, than are the actors in the second tale.

But putting aside the question of relative merits in the various tales, it is not too much to say that

the whole *Earthly Paradise* is such a work as cannot be found in modern literature regarded as a repertory of Aryan myth, tradition, and legend. Founded almost exclusively on tales current at different epochs among nations of the great Indo-European family, this work is a more complete and homogeneous collection of the myths and traditions of that family than any one hand has yet got together and fused, by stress of individuality in the rendering, into a luxuriant and beautiful form. And when to this work is added *The Life and Death of Jason* with its many complete episodes, Mr. Morris's unflagging energy in working at these legends, that are and always must be so dear to every Englishman, becomes a matter for no small astonishment. Were this poet no more than he has playfully called himself, a 'dreamer of dreams born out of his due time,' the permanency of his works might be questionable. But whatever he dreams, or whatever dream of other men he makes his own for the nonce, is rendered vivid by so much reality, so much healthiness of landscape and sky, so much truth of human interest, psychology so sterling as far as it goes, that with the easy musical flow of his rhythm and his perfectly individual simplicity of song-language, these works must be an heirloom of price for later generations as long as English poetry is read. Some readers may start at seeing so modern a word as 'psychology' connected with Mr. Morris's name;

but that this least curiously psychological of all our real poets of the present day has closely studied souls there can be no moment's doubt. He chooses generally to treat psychological phenomena of the greatest simplicity available, and delights not in the setting or solving of problems of human character. But his men and women *are* men and women: they love with the passion of adult and healthy persons, and not with the rose-colour sentimentality of boys and girls, or the pallid and *blasé* ferocity of jaded *roués*. Their life is large and open, and their interest enduring for living men and women, however far such may be removed by modern use from openness and largeness in their own lives. In *The Lovers of Gudrun* the highest note attainable under these conditions has been struck: it is a tale to which, rather than to the *Völsunga Saga*, I would append the invitation prefixed by the poet to his translation of that saga—

‘ So draw ye round and hearken, English Folk,
Unto the best tale pity ever wrought! . . .
Of utter love defeated utterly,
Of Grief too strong to give Love time to die!’

XV.

RICHARD HENRY HORNE.

‘ the Drama’s throne-room where
The rulers of our art, in whose full veins
Dynastic glories mingle, sit in strength
And do their kingly work,—conceive, command,
And, from the imagination’s crucial heat,
Catch up their men and women all a-flame
For action, all alive and forced to prove
Their life by living out heart, brain, and nerve,
Until mankind makes witness, “These be men
As we are,” and vouchsafes the greeting due
To Imogen and Juliet—sweetest kin
On art’s side.’

E. B. BROWNING.

‘ Truth dwels in gulphs, whose deepes hide shades so rich
That Night sits muffled there in clouds of pitch
More darke than Nature made her; and requires
(To cleare her tough mists) heaven’s great fire of fires,
To wrestle with these heaven-strong mysteries.’

G. CHAPMAN.

RICHARD HENRY HORNE.

IT has been long for me a matter of astonishment that so little is now known to the general public of Mr. Horne's many admirable works. From time to time he is named as 'the author of *Orion*;' and he seems to be vaguely conceived of by the present generation as a brilliant light who flashed one work of genius in the wide eyes of the world, and then dipped down once and for all under his particular bushel. But in fact Mr. Horne has been one of the most prolific of writers and vigorous of workers in general literature, and has produced several poetic or dramatic works as considerable as *Orion*, and some superior to that in many important respects. Had Mr. Horne done nothing but *Orion*, it would not have been very surprising that, after a few editions of that highly intellectual epic had been sold, and after the author had ceased to come prominently before the public, fresh editions of the poem were no longer imperatively demanded, and those who wished to obtain it had to grope about bookstalls in the difficult endeavour to find an old copy of the sewed pamphlet published first at the comical price of one farthing. But when one

looks at the long list of good things put before (and plentifully praised by) the men who grew up with Tennyson and Browning, and saw the last of Leigh Hunt and Wordsworth, it seems strange that no sufficient demand was made to force Mr. Horne into issuing some convenient edition of his poems and dramas; for, with the exception of *The Death of Marlowe*, none of these can be readily had.

If asked to define the position of Mr. Horne in English literature, I should not hesitate to name him as the tragic dramatist who, since the grand Elizabethan period, has most successfully combined in his plays the loftier qualities of intellect and emotion with complete actableness. Actable plays, with no qualities beyond a certain easy actableness, are plentiful enough; and unactable plays, with high tragic qualities and large intellectuality, might be counted up by tens and twenties by any person disposed to examine the dramatic work of England for the last thirty years or so. But plays fulfilling both sets of requirements in the same measure as Mr. Horne's do are exceedingly scarce; and the fact that he does not at this moment hold in the general estimation any such status as must in fairness be accorded to him is, at first sight, difficult to account for. The explanation, however, is not very far to seek. Mr. Horne's want of sustained and complete success must be set down to his extraordinary versatility and unflagging energy.

When we look at the scores of good magazine and review articles traceable to him, at his many literary productions below the rank of capital works—when we hear of his early military services in Mexico and his late active physical labours at the antipodes, of his intermediate editorships and lecturings and writings of an anonymous or pseudonymous class, not to mention services on commissions of inquiry, and practical interest taken in swimming questions, &c. &c.—when we put all these things together, it is easy to sum up a total of energy which, if all applied in one direction, would certainly have carried Mr. Horne's name to any altitude he might have aspired to see it blazing at. As matters stand, I prefer to look upon him simply as a powerful dramatic genius rather than as the man of varied gifts he has shown himself to be; and thus I may be pardoned for regarding even *Orion* as a digression on a large scale from the dramatist's legitimate career. The tragic line is the highest line along which he has moved; and we may profitably follow him along that line, to the exclusion of all his other doings except *Orion*.

It was in 1843 that this work appeared. The story of *Orion*, the giant son of Poseidon, was described by a contemporary critic as a 'spiritual epic;' and it was not till eleven years later that the author retorted, in a preface to an Australian edition, that his work might as properly have been called a 'cor-

poreal epic,' since it deals with outer life at least as much as with inner life. He confessed, however, on that occasion that the poem was meant to work out a special design, applicable to all times, by means of antique or classical imagery and associations; and he explained to his new Australian public that the hero of his fable was intended to present a type of the struggle of man with himself—that is 'the contest between the intellect and the senses when the energies are equally balanced.' The didactic purpose of the piece is indeed perfectly clear; but there is far too much action in it to justify any one in calling it a spiritual poem, although there is not that measure of outwardness or objectivity that one usually associates with epic poetry. The character of the hero is nobly conceived as that of a man in whom the practical and theoretical, the ideal and the real, are fairly combined; and his nature is developed under three phases of human passion—the ideal or wholly *unsensuous*, the *hypersensuous*, and the final fitting combination of spiritual and bodily love. A great deal of the action is obtained by the two transfers of the hero's affections; for the three phases of his passion have three separate objects—Artemis the chaste and terrible and intellectual, Merope the supremely beautiful work of flesh and blood, and Eos the passion-pure goddess of the morning. In the working out of all this, however, there is not sufficient vividness of interest called

forth in the fortunes of the actors, no adequate appeal to the senses, to ensure *Orion's* ever becoming a permanently popular work; and while it is full of fine poetic feeling, it lacks that quality of convincingly real life found so plentifully in many works that soar much less high in regard to scope and purpose. No one could read *Orion* without seeing in every page the distinctive marks of poetry; and, above all, none could fail to observe passage upon passage of that all-important compactness of make only found in high poetry: indeed there are lines in *Orion* that one must go far to surpass, as for instance,

‘The long gray horizontal wall of the dead-calm sea,’

which, scan it as you please, embodies a world of oceanic stillness; and there is something of the same weighty propriety in the lines,

‘And iron-crowned Night her black breath poured around,
To meet the clouds that from Olympus rolled
Billows of darkness with a dirging roar.’

After the author had made his literary début with the *Exposition of the False Medium and the Barriers excluding Men of Genius from the Public*, he seems to have settled at once on the drama as his proper field; for his next volume was *Spirit of Peers and People, a national Tragi-comedy and Satire*, and at about the same time he contributed to an annual *The Fetches*, a very brief three-act tragedy. The tragi-comedy has a great deal of dramatic movement; but there

the poet paid too much attention to satirising the political persons of the day to leave free scope for his dramatic talent ; and the work is essentially local in its tone. *The Fetches*, on the other hand, is as interesting now as it was then ; but it is too subtle and compressed and limited in action to be a perfect success in the hands of one whose talent lies so distinctly in the domain of the acting, or at all events actable, drama.

The next two works, *Cosmo de' Medici* and *The Death of Marlowe*, quite took by storm the friends of legitimate tragedy in 1837. In these plays there is nothing that betrays a weak or faltering hand. Never to be characterised as merely imitative of Elizabethan dramas, they are yet full of the spirit of that epoch so far as it inspired works full of truth and passion, appealing to the minds and hearts of men who were refined and knew something of real life, and, at the same time, meeting the requirements of the stage in contradistinction to those of the study only. It was in those days that English playwrights best knew how, in transcribing human life, to organise the transcript into a spectacle, preserving a just and noble balance between the appeal to an audience's sense of stirring outward action, and the appeal to man's deeper sense of things emotional and intellectual. Mr. Horne has followed those playwrights religiously in these things. He has not borrowed

thoughts and phrases from them, he has copied them in no stage-tricks, has never mistrusted his own originality, and has eschewed most of their faults. Yet we often come upon lines of a weight and grandeur reminding us of Beaumont and Fletcher, upon passages of almost extravagant soaring loftiness suggestive of no man but the sublime Kit Marlowe, upon brilliant sparkling scenes of a raciness and vigour that recall the exuberant animal spirits of Shakespeare, and upon dread depths of human passion that send the mind back upon the awful craftsmanship of John Webster.

All these characteristics, seen in luxuriant plenty in *Cosmo de' Medici*, which is a full five-act tragedy, are found also in the one act that constitutes *The Death of Marlowe*; but the essential greatness, whether of the larger or of the smaller play, is in the fine conception of the characters and action, and the admirable fitness of the execution. Christopher Marlowe and Duke Cosmo the First of Tuscany are both men with whom history or tradition has dealt hardly; while no historian or tradition-monger has been able to 'heap up words' high enough to hide and bury away from the piercing sight of genius and generosity of soul those indelible marks of lofty character and fine aim which those two great men carved deep into their respective spheres of life. In the brief career of the dramatist who indicated lines for even Shake-

speare to follow, who, albeit extravagant and unbridled in his imagination, yet carried the art of tragic poetry into regions pure and rare from their very altitude, Mr. Horne discerned something more than the recklessness and even wantonness often ascribed to him; and in Marlowe's premature death, the modern dramatist saw suggestions of something very far removed from the vulgar last wriggle of a mud-worm in his kindred muck, which those must have had in mind who helped to fabricate and hand down the tale of Marlowe's death being brought about in a low drinking-brawl. And, in like manner, that dark deed of Cosmo's, the slaying of his younger son Garcia—a deed so revolting to the mind, regarded in the light usually thrown upon it—is seen by Mr. Horne as far other than an act of mere savage vengeance executed on the younger son for the sake of the elder, who had, through some mischance, fallen by his brother's hand.

The motive of each play will only be seized in its entirety by such as choose to read the works for themselves, carefully and more than once or twice. In *The Death of Marlowe*, the most important point in the life of two souls is worked upon with an extraordinary fervour and concentration of brain-power. Marlowe has conceived an overwhelming, perhaps fantastic passion, such as Marlowe would have conceived if his works tell truth of his nature, for a

beautiful woman—Cecilia, the runaway *once* virtuous ‘wife of the Drunkard Bengough.’ This passion, fraught with manly respect, has blinded him to all but the finer parts of the woman’s nature, and might have led him, had things gone well, to a settlement of character and directness of aim such as the man never in truth came to. Cecilia, on the other hand, breathed upon by the loftiness of the genuine passion Marlowe has conceived and avowed for her, a mere courtesan, grows to hate her life, and care only for those better elements of her nature which he discerns and dwells upon with a dramatist’s idealising force; so that all is in a fair way for the indefinite raising of two souls. But before this flower of promise can be brought to wholesome fruit, the accumulated sins of men and women—Cecilia among the number, and Marlowe among the number—are brought to one of those deadly fruits that poison the offenders’ selves. ‘Jack-o’-night,’ a tavern-pander and pimp, stung by words of scorn that Cecilia utters in her remorse for that old life he has so often helped along its ugly way, excites Marlowe, the cause of her change, to attack him; and the dramatist falls, stabbed with his own sword.

It might have been thought that to develop a female character from a reckless courtesan to a thoughtful and right-souled woman, in the space of one very moderate act, would be a task almost impossible to

accomplish without inartistic abruptness—especially when so much else had to be done in the space as was done in *The Death of Marlowe*; but it is not too much to say that, in the new edition of this little work, the psychological treatment of Cecilia is faultless and ample—though in the first edition a good deal now depicted was left to the imagination: two new scenes, in which Mr. Horne has introduced Cecilia, give a fresh perfection to what was originally not defective; and these scenes now seem so essential, that one can hardly realise one's old enjoyment of the play without them. The interpolated passage on the awakening of the woman contains some of the finest touches. The last words of Cecilia *before* this scene are—

'Cursed! accursed be the freaks of Nature,
That mar us from ourselves, and make our acts
The scorn and loathing of our afterthoughts—
The finger-mark of Conscience, who, most treacherous,
Wakes to accuse, but slumber'd o'er the sin.'

She is here only in an unwholesome state of revolt against her unwholesome life, and has not attained to a noble sorrow—she is but half awakened; and the new scene marks a most important stage in the growth and change of her discontent with herself. When Marlowe asks her to stay one moment, and she replies that that is not much to ask, and he has retorted with one of his rhapsodic love-utterances, she breaks forth with a genuine sickness of soul—

'O, sir, you make me very sad at heart;
Let's speak no more of this. I am on my way
To walk beside the river.'

'Then, after repeated denial of his request for permission to go with her, and after one more rhapsody poured forth by him in her praise, she resumes the whole tragedy of her repentant soul in the words—'Considering all things, this is bitter sweet'—betrays the birth, or re-birth, of healthy unselfish instincts in the little speech,—'Ah! Kit Marlowe,—you think too much of me—and of yourself too little!'—and goes with a promise to return and bid him good-night on her way home. All this, coming immediately before the catastrophe, opens up innumerable suggestions of undeveloped possibilities, and serves to throw up, on a background of heightened regret, the terrible pathos of the close. The death-scene is one of the most impetuous actions in the whole range of modern tragedy. The fierce current of Marlowe's despair at the blighting of his hopes about Cecilia, and at the ignominious manner of his death, comes with such force as to strike a puerile tremor even into the heart of the 'rabid cur' whose reckless hand has set the current free; and the reader has only just time to draw a breath of relief after the awful and sudden stillness of Marlowe's death before Cecilia rushes in 'like a gust of wind,' as Middleton expresses it, and puts the climax on the highly-strung agony of the situation by her lament over Marlowe's

corpse. The author has not made the mistake of piling the one sorrow close on the top of the other, but has given just the breathing-space alluded to above by adding some sharp firm final strokes to the masterly portrait of Jack-o'-night, who with true 'poetic justice' is seized and dragged off to the gallows 'for sundry villanies committed.'

But the conversancy shown in this little work with the deep lore of human souls, and with the loftiest principles of tragic poetry, as well as the technical requirements of the stage drama, is shown in fivefold measure in the five-act tragedy of *Cosmo de' Medici*; and it is good to note the nature of the dramatist's interpretation of the sombre and obscure page of Florentine history he chose on that occasion for a groundwork. His Cosmo is a man of grand aims, and of hopes centred in his elder son Giovanni; and when those hopes are brought to dust and ashes through the fatal quarrel of Giovanni and Garcia, he is convinced of an appalling blackness of guilt on the younger's part, and solemnly performs the office of executioner rather than submit to the disgrace of a public execution. His deed is done in deep anguish of soul; and he never recovers the blow, which is aggravated tenfold by the subsequent discovery that Giovanni was the aggressor, and Garcia acted in self-defence. I cannot here follow the unravelling of this dreadful tangle of mischance and misapprehension.

The coil is brought about and unravelled by the author with exceptional ability and nobleness of idea; and the whole work abounds in passages that would stand in almost any companionship for breadth and ease of expression, and beauty or incision of thought. One of the finest speeches in the play is that of Cosmo after the boys are dead, when he is consulted as to the execution of some pirates: it is compressed into less than three lines:

‘Set them all free!
Death hath two noble gifts, and well can wait
For the flaw’d casts from man’s precarious mould.’

An interpolated scene in which Cosmo is depicted reeling on the verge of insanity, and which appeared later in *The Monthly Review*, is as masterly as anything of the kind done in these days.

When those two pieces were produced, Mr. Horne was working with great fervour towards the regeneration of the stage. Those two contributions were daringly intellectual, looking at the poor nature of the bulk of what audiences found acceptable; but three years later, when the regeneration appears to have been still a living possibility for Mr. Horne, he made in his *Gregory VII.* a flight higher still in daring intellectuality; for this—the last published of his five-act tragedies—was carried through without the assistance of the more obvious passions of humanity. Here again he followed his former bent of reconstructing an historical conception. The Monk Hil-

debrand, who deposed and elected popes by strong command of character, and finally rose to the pope-dom himself under the title of Gregory VII., is painted by some as a very devil of iniquity; whereas the dramatist, recognising more than personal ambition in the career of the man who 'established the supremacy of the Church over all other sovereignties, and created a new system of things which endured nearly five hundred years after his death,' has given to his Gregory VII. all the weight of one acting so as to lead an age, and acting with full consciousness as to what manner of work he is about. Gregory thus appears as a great soul in troublous times, and with the full measure of unscrupulousness that troublous times cast upon a great soul, if his work be one of remodelling. How strongly the man, as here portrayed, can act or wait with equal purpose—can keep his mind fixed on large and splendid ideas while contemplating even a dark murder—is well shown in his soliloquy after he has struck Pope Alexander at high mass, because that weak occupant of St. Peter's chair had veiled the crest of the papacy to the Emperor Henry IV. of Germany. In psychological grasp and dramatic ability *Gregory VII.* is, if anything, an advance on *Cosmo de' Medici*; but the author seems to have found it a hopeless task to stem the downward current of English dramatic taste, and to have left off writing tragedies on this noblest of models.

Nevertheless his bent has once and again shown itself to be unmistakably dramatic ; for he published in 1848 the mystery play *Judas Iscariot* ; in 1852 an acting edition of Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, most carefully and ably reconstructed for the modern stage ; and in 1864 his latest important work, *Prometheus the Fire-bringer*—a fine attempt to restore the lost first play of the Promethean trilogy. Even as late as 1870 he put forth, as an appendix to the Chevalier de Chatelain's *Merchant of Venice*, a 'dramatic reverie,' working out the judgment-scene in that play so as to accord with modern biological science—another fact that shows the persistent dramatic turn of his mind. It was this persistent dramatic turn of mind, no doubt, that gave to his *Prometheus* a congeniality wanting in *Orion*,—the Greek lyric drama being more akin than blank-verse narrative to his darling models of the Elizabethan era. The mystery or miracle play is still nearer akin ; and *Judas Iscariot* is one of the author's finest works—ranking with the three Elizabethan tragedies, as one must call them for want of a better term.

This mystery play is based on the same view of the betrayal of Christ as is adopted in Mr. Story's epistle from a 'Roman Lawyer ;' but while the Roman lawyer's account amounts to a special pleading in favour of Judas's purity of intention, Mr. Horne's play merely paints the betrayer as free from the

utterly grovelling motive attributed to him by the popular tradition. No less an ecclesiastic than Archbishop Whately seems to have espoused the more lenient view of Judas; and Mr. Horne, taking his cue from the learned churchman, embraced the idea with all the passion of a dramatist, while guarding, as he expresses it, 'against the evil of being led away by the freshness and force of this new point of vision, into making a sort of hero of so great a criminal.' Iscariot's 'gross personal interests, his craving for worldly pomp, and power, and exterminating vengeance upon all enemies,' Mr. Horne has regarded as 'the antitheses to all true heroism.' He has made the crime of the betrayal revolting enough without supposing the traitor to have been actuated by 'a mere purposeless malignity, or by a mere sordid motive of the most trivial kind;' and while throughout the piece Judas is kept hideously apart from all wholesome communion with his fellow-creatures, the appalling gloom of the man's remorse, and the awful horror of his end, are given with that truth of tragic art which leaves the reader profoundly moved with compassion. One of the best scenes is that showing up the two-fold character of Judas as worldly calculator and enthusiastic believer in Christ's godhead. The keeper of the purse soliloquises fitly enough in a keen analytic vein; but added to this is that part of the man's nature which is Mr. Horne's special creation:—

‘He passeth on
Teaching and healing, nor can I discern
One smile of secret consciousness that soon
All this shall end—and his true kingdom, come.
Somewhat he lacketh. He is great of soul,
Filled with divine power, but too angel-sweet
For turbulent earth and its gross exigencies ;
Strong in design, and magnanimity,
Forbearance, fortitude, and lovingness,
He lacketh still the vehement kingly will—
Will, bred of earth and all that it inherits—
To seize the mountain by its forest hair
And whirl it into dust. On that soft plain,
The Temple of his Father—the true Spirit—
Straightway might we erect, and not lie hid
In secret places, like forlorn wild beasts
Who dread the hunter’s spear. Why doth he wait?
Would he were seized !—condemned to instant death—
Set on a brink, and all his hopes for man
Endangered by his fall—till these extremes
Drew violent lightning from him !—Burning thoughts
Why haunt ye thus my brain—so oft—so fiercely—
As though ’twere mine to do your bidding—mine,
To touch his garment with this dreadful torch. (*He pauses.*)
And yet the intolerable fantasy
Creeps ever down my forehead—round my feet—
Until a deed comes crouching at my hand,
Which beckon’d not, but cannot chase away !’

This tremendous realisation of the necessity to put his traitorous scheme into execution is masterly ; and the conception has been finely carried out in another scene wherein the man’s mind, here already beginning to give objective existence to its own creations, sees ghosts and phantoms besetting his path and only giving way as he passes through them, determined to do the deed he has imagined.

I would fain have given a circumstantial account of Mr. Horne’s very eventful career in literature ; but I

do not think I could better employ the space I have to spare than in the foregoing remarks on his dramatic works, which are thoroughly good in all respects. Chiefly, the types of humanity are excellent and various. The author uttered in his *Essay on Tragic Influence* a grand text for a poet of his proclivities : — ‘ The duty of the dramatist is simply to be true to his men and women.’ And this text he has followed if ever dramatist did. The whole of his characters—male or female, bad, good, or indifferent—are coherent, compact, and lifelike ; they are all acting, thinking men and women—generally those whose stirring circumstances give a goodly zest to the spectator of their lives ; and in each situation they act and speak in perfect accordance with the general idea of their characters. Were it not so, it would be comparatively little that Mr. Horne had made so urgent an attempt to reclaim the stage in England ; but, as it is so, his life in his countrymen’s minds is insured on the ‘ absolute security’ principle. Even if he follow the allotted course of men of genius, and remain unappreciated awhile, the end is yet no less certain—that his dramatic works will be regarded as among the best and loftiest of their kind.

XVI.

HENRY TAYLOR.

'The excess of Life in those whose passionate activity was accompanied by intellect, imagination, designs, and deeds, becomes transmissible in full action of heart and head from age to age, exactly in proportion to the truth and completeness with which their characters and actions are chronicled, and brought home to the intense abstract interests and individual sympathies of mankind.'—R. H. HORNE.

HENRY TAYLOR.

It were no impossible task to deduce a dramatist's views on life from his plays, because, although his duty 'is simply to be true to his men and women,' his men and women will be so conceived that, without dereliction of that duty, he will make his plays emphasise what he feels emphatically in his inmost soul. His profound and earnest truths will be placed in the mouths of profound and earnest personages, and his sprightly unimportant sayings will be so thrown in as to take on no more importance than the artist, in his heart, awards to their correlative views and sentiments. It is entertaining to note the curious opinions and sentiments constantly attributed to Shakespeare for want of proper observance of the circumstances under which the words quoted are uttered in his plays: by this means it is possible that the vast sanity and largeness of soul that Shakespeare undoubtedly owned should be misrepresented by any careless person who might attribute to him some leprous sentiment of the Moor Aaron or some devilish villany of Iago's. But beside the sayings of a dramatist's men and women, we have to take into ac-

count their doings, and also to observe the doings of depicted circumstance in modifying the characters as conceived in the rough : if this were done with care and insight one might succeed in developing from any collection of serious plays a treatise on the modes and phases of human existence. In the case of Sir Henry Taylor's plays, no amount of care and insight of this kind would be ill bestowed ; but the dramatist has himself on divers occasions chosen to speak to his readers as man to man ; and whoever pleases to read Sir Henry Taylor's essays may learn with much personal advantage, in a direct manner, somewhat of the wisdom and knowledge of nature which, in an indirect manner, is set forth in various dramatic works,—and, be it also stated, much wisdom and knowledge not as yet embodied by the author in such compositions. On all subjects that he treats in prose Sir Henry Taylor is a notably sane and competent authority ; and in all his dramatic conceptions sanity and nobleness of thought are salient qualities.

Of his essays, the celebrated one *On Money** seems to me less original and important than most,—less important because it is more markedly than the rest applicable to the lives of the upper ten thousand, and less original because there are not in it any thoughts with which thinking people need be unfamiliar even if they have never seen the essay.

* *Notes from Life*, London, 1847.

But the little treatise *On Wisdom** takes a much higher standing, as being of general applicability and of marked originality: also it seems to comment on what is unquestionably the author's masterpiece,—his great dramatic romance, *Philip Van Artevelde*, published in 1834. There is a profound truth in the conception of wisdom set forth in the following words:

'Wisdom is not the same with understanding, talents, capacity, ability, sagacity, sense, or prudence—not the same with any one of these; neither will all these together make it up. It is that exercise of the reason into which the heart enters—a structure of the understanding rising out of the moral and spiritual nature. . . . Great intellect . . . is certainly exposed to unusual temptations; for as power and pre-eminence lie before it, so ambition attends it, which, whilst it determines the will and strengthens the activities, inevitably weakens the moral fabric.'

Philip Van Artevelde, in the first of the two plays bearing his name, is placed before us as a calm, wise, thoughtful man, leading, in very troublous times, an even life apart from the turbulence of the factions rending the social fabric of his native town Ghent. His main *public* occupation being that of angling, he is chiefly reputed as a good quiet gentleman skilled in taking river fish; and the perfect knowledge of the times acquired by him in his lonely pursuits, to say nothing of intellectual power and philosophic resources and firm self-government, developed in his calm life and in sessions of thoughtful converse with his wise preceptor, Father John of Heda, are entirely

* *Notes from Life.*

unrecognised by the stirring and striving Ghentsmen. But the reader has not been long with this quiet man before he finds out that there is here the greatness of soul needed for leadership; and when, partly from the fact that Philip's father has been chief in Ghent before him, partly from the imminent fall of the bloodthirsty men in command, partly from the enmity of one who wishes to see him in a dangerous position, Philip has the option of leaving his calm life for the troublesome captaincy of Ghent, the issue of his choice is clear. He demands but two hours to think the matter over; and no sooner is Van den Bosch, who offers the captaincy, gone from him, than we know Philip's purpose is taken—and taken with that best 'wisdom of the heart' that leads a man to step into any sphere he sees he can occupy with advantage to his fellows. There are two matters that come into the question beside what lies simply between himself and Ghent—first the duty of avenging his father, perfidiously slain by Ghentsmen at his own door, and secondly the duty of living to protect a much-loved only sister—a duty whereof the performance must naturally be imperilled by acceptance of a high position in times of battle, murder, and sudden death. In Philip's soliloquy after the departure of Van den Bosch these things are finely balanced; but we feel nonetheless that the solution is reached:

'Is it vain-glory which thus whispers me
That 'tis ignoble to have led my life
In idle meditations—that the times
Demand me, echoing my father's name?
Oh! what a fiery heart was his! such souls
Whose sudden visitations daze the world,
Vanish like lightning, but they leave behind
A voice that in the distance far away
Wakens the slumbering ages. Oh! my father!
Thy life is eloquent, and more persuades
Unto dominion than thy death deters;
For that reminds me of a debt of blood
Descended with my patrimony to me,
Whose paying off would clear my soul's estate.'

In the fourteenth century this duty of vengeance was so much a matter of course that we can only hold Philip in respect for feeling it as a duty, and must not let it seem to detract from his magnanimity. Throughout the first part of the work, Van Artevelde, elected thus to the leadership, shows the same strength of heart and quickness of perception evinced in this first step, and leads the citizens through trouble upon trouble to a state of glorious independence, by always striking the right track at the right moment,—till at last his course is crowned with the high honour and responsibility of the Regency of Flanders. It is then, and not before, that ambition steps in to 'weaken the moral fabric.' As Captain of Ghent he has sufficient occupation in resisting the arrogance of the Earl of Flanders and setting his fellow-citizens in their right standing; and, being led on by noble patriotism rather than by personal ambition, he is kept at that grand level that a mag-

nificent nature can always attain in full employment under fitting circumstances. But when he has succeeded in every undertaking, driven the Earl out of his hereditary dominions, placed Ghent absolutely at the head of Flanders, and well-nigh at the head of Europe, and assumed the Regency, he has reached the point at which his own soul will not let him fall back into any kind of quietness, and the urgency and vigorous movement of the times will not let him stand still. And so, the reader, who has seen in the first play the splendid triumph of a splendid character, has to look on in the second play while that same character passes through a sad and sombre decadence to a violent death.

Although the first play seems to me to be somewhat finer on the whole than the second, it is doubtful whether the great vigour and power of shaping character and action in the one are not countervailed by the pathos of the other; and indeed there are but few things in contemporary literature more profoundly pathetic than this fall of a fine soul. The Captain of Ghent, fresh from an open life of sound self-discipline and culture, could resolutely ascend the steps of the stadt-house in that memorable scene that ends the second act, and play out the part resolved on beforehand in stabbing one of the treacherous messengers who had attempted to negotiate a disgraceful and disastrous peace between Ghent and

the Earl ; and he thus discharged his duty of trust together with his duty of vengeance ; for the messengers, of whom he stabbed one and Van den Bosch the other, were the same men who had slain Philip's father. But the Regent of Flanders, deprived of the tenderly loving wife who crowned and shared the successes of the Captain of Ghent, turned from his fresh and vigorous perceptions by courtly emulations and contact with a corrupt society, led by passion to form a liaison with the estranged mistress of the Duke of Bourbon, has not, at a critical moment, the unbending strength of purpose to persist in the execution of the treacherous Sir Fleureant of Heurlée, who quits him for his clemency by stabbing him when his life is of the utmost importance to his cause. It cannot be truly said that Philip wittingly sacrificed his cause, the cause of Flemish liberty, to his passion for Elena ; but, as the play stands, there is at least a probable connection between his contract with her and the disastrous issue of the struggle with France : —it is Elena that begs him to spare Sir Fleureant, though justly condemned to death ; and when he does spare him it is on the condition that, in the event of the Regent's fall, the knight shall befriend the lady against her sometime protector, the Duke of Bourbon : when the battle is going against the Flemings, and nothing but the sight of their dauntless leader will keep them from rout, Sir Fleureant spreads

the word that Artevelde is down, and watching his moment, gives his rumour a bloody truthfulness by his dastardly dagger-thrust.

When Artevelde's force is routed, and Artevelde's self lies dead, and the tragedy has been duly summed up with the death of Sir Fleureant by Elena's frantic hand, and her death by the pikes of men at arms, the Duke of Burgundy thwarts the spite of the Duke of Bourbon in a grand comment fitly closing the work :

Bourbon. Take forth the bodies. For the woman's corse,
Let it have Christian burial. As for his,
The arch-insurgent's, hang it on a tree
Where all the host may see it.

Burgundy. Brother, no ;
It were not for our honour, nor the king's,
To use it so. Dire rebel though he was,
Yet with a noble nature and great gifts
Was he endow'd,—courage, discretion, wit,
An equal temper and an ample soul,
Rock-bound and fortified against assaults
Of transitory passion, but below
Built on a surging subterranean fire
That stirr'd and lifted him to high attempts.
So prompt and capable, and yet so calm,
He nothing lack'd in sovereignty but the right,
Nothing in soldiership except good fortune.
Wherefore with honour lay him in his grave,
And thereby shall increase of honour come
Unto their arms who vanquish'd one so wise,
So valiant, so renown'd. Sirs, pass we on,
And let the bodies follow us in biers.
Wolf of the weald and yellow-footed kite,
Enough is spread for you of meaner prey.
Other interment than your maws afford
Is due to these. At Courtray we shall sleep,
And there I'll see them buried side by side.

In *Isaac Comnenus*, published in 1827, and the

earliest of the author's acknowledged dramas, the hero is conceived in something of the same spirit that Philip is conceived in. Isaac, like Philip, is a man of foresight, energy, and dauntlessness, ready to step into greatness, but not anxious for it. But there is a cynical element in the character of Isaac that we do not get in Philip; and while the one, achieving his greatness, lets himself be carried into all the pomp of greatness, the other, having triumphed completely over his enemies and won a crown, places that crown on the head of his younger brother, resolves to retire into quiet life, and is only prevented from doing so by the tragic death that fate has stored for him. Isaac's masterly state of preparation for all emergencies is finely depicted in two scenes of the second act. In one he is shown in consultation with his friends as to the course to be pursued in a great danger: it is clear that the Emperor of the East and the Patriarch of the Greek Church (the scene is at Constantinople, at the end of the eleventh century) meditate an attack on him, as obnoxious to both church and state: in the midst of his council, Theodora, the Emperor's daughter, enamoured of Comnenus, comes to renew overtures favourable to him but treasonable to her father; and close on her heels arrives the imperial guard with a summons for Isaac to attend a synod at that time assembled. The whole body of men is admitted, overpowered, and disarmed;

and Isaac, having given full directions to his friends, prepares to march to the palace, and answer the summons, his own bodyguard surrounding the disarmed imperial guard. In the next scene the Emperor, the Patriarch, and many ecclesiastics are discovered in synod, awaiting the arrival of Comnenus; and they are thrown into confusion by the announcement that he has arrived at the head of his own men. What follows is exceedingly fine; and I extract it:

'Patriarch. Silence, my lords, what craven cries be these?
Your Majesty will please send some one forth
To draw your forces from the suburbs round.
I tell you take your seats. Ho! God is great!
His Church is mighty, and that might have we.
I say, bring up the Count.

Several voices.

He's coming up.

Patriarch. I say, then, let him come.

*Enter COMNENUS, who walks to the foot of the table,
the crowd falling back on either side.*

Comnenus. I'm here to answer to your summons.

Patriarch.

Lo!

Almighty God is present in his Church!

His Church is present here!

How hast thou dared then to profane this presence

By coming here in arms? Give up thy sword.

[COMNENUS ungirds his sword and flings it on the table.

Comnenus (after some pause). What would ye have with it
that cannot use it?

My lords, ye do but mock me: here am I

Brought by your midnight summons from my house,

And ye have nought to say. Ye do but mock me.

Patriarch. We mock thee not: 'tis thou that mock'st high
heaven.

Thou'rt summon'd here on many an ugly count

Of sacrilege and heresy and schism,

Which so thou answer not and clear thy fame,

We shall, in due acquittance of our trust,

Pronounce the interdict from fire and water,

And cut thee off from Christian fellowship.

Comnenus. My lords, or e'er ye do inhibit me
 From fire and water, have it you in charge
 I cut not off yourselves from earth and air.
 My lords, this world is not so all your own
 That ye can grant away the elements
 Amongst your friends, and lock one moiety up
 From them that like you not. Ye kneel and pray
 That God will make you humble as the dust,
 Then, rising, arrogate omnipotence,
 And shake the ashes from your shaven crowns.
 But I will teach you veriest lowliness.

Patriarch (holds up the cross and pronounces the adjuration, "*Ecce crucem Domini! fugite partes adversæ!*").

A man possess'd—'tis Sathan speaks, not he!

The father of lies hath spoken by his mouth
 An exorcist for this demoniac straight
 To disenchant his body of the fiend!

Comnenus. Ye charge your own malignancy on me.
 A demonocracy of unclean spirits
 Hath govern'd long these synods of your Church,
 The Antichrist foretold: and I am he
 Who, in the fulness of the approaching time,
 Will exorcise you all. Expect my coming.

[Exit.]

To me there is something truly magnificent in the action and bearing of *Comnenus* at this juncture, —a might of spirit worthy of large handling and handled with a largeness not often seen in plays of these times. The amount of movement and excitement that the author has infused into these two scenes is among the most remarkable features of his works. Indeed, although *Isaac Comnenus* is the youngest of them, there is nothing at all immature about it,—the chief indication of short experience being a great fondness for long scientific words. The conception is profound and the execution powerful throughout; and there is in especial one piece of

psychology that is admirably carried through. Isaac Comnenus shows a certain factitious buoyancy of speech and bearing that is at first a little puzzling; and it is not until we are let see, in the third act, that there is a frightful void in his heart, over which the nimble fireflies of his half bitter speech have been keeping up their artificial buzz and dance, that we comprehend his manner fully. The tragedy of his antecedents, disclosed in his churchyard soliloquy over the grave of the lost Irene, whom he seems to have loved too much, is finely balanced and complemented by the tragic close,—his assassination by Theodora, whose love he has rejected.

The capital point in *Edwin the Fair*, the play which followed *Philip Van Artevelde* at an interval of eight years, is the conception and treatment of Dunstan, the much-maligned Abbot of Glastonbury. His made-up miracles are capitally brought before us, and subtly defended by the abbot himself; and, what is best, the mountebank side of his character is entirely subordinated to that spirit of enthusiastic leadership that placed him at the head of the Church party as opposed to the Secular party. Dunstan is not a *lovable* character; but he is *respectable* by virtue of his unity of purpose and dominance of personality in the midst of a troubled social scene. In the rendering of the boy-king Edwin, too, there is much beauty. Carried away by his passion for El-

giva, he is yet no mere weakling; and we get a fine suggestion of what his youth held undeveloped in the scene between him and Dunstan in the tower, where the abbot, after subduing the youth's spirit by starvation, offers him the alternative of abdication or death. The whole king in him breaks out triumphantly when Dunstan, after contrasting the joys of private life and the uneasiness of kingdom, asks

‘What call is thine
From God or man, what voice within bids thee
Such pleasures to forego, such cares confront?
Edwin. What voice? My kingdom's voice—my people's cry,
Whom ye devour—the wail of shepherds true
Over their flocks, those godly, kindly priests
That love my people and love me withal—
Their voice requires me, and the voice of kings
Who died with honour and who live in me,
The voice of Egbert, Ethelbert, and Alfred.
What wouldst thou more? the voice of kings unborn
To whom my sceptre and my blood descends—
A thousand voices call me.’

Up to the issue of *Edwin the Fair* (1842), Sir Henry Taylor's dramas were exclusively tragic; and his latest work in this kind, *St. Clement's Eve* (1862), is also a historic tragedy like the rest; but between *Edwin the Fair* and that, came a play of a very different character,—*A Sicilian Summer*, published in 1850 under the title of *The Virgin Widow*. Lighter in style than any of the others, it is as enjoyable as the best and weightiest; and while the historic tragedies recall the manner of Shakespeare's historic plays, this lighter work recalls the manner of *Much*

Ado about Nothing and other dramas in that style. Indeed *A Sicilian Summer* is just as sprightly and vivacious in its airier movement as *Isaac*, *Philip*, and *Edwin* are direct and vivid and earnest in their more solid and serious progress; and while the events of this entertaining play go over in that glib and opportune manner one expects in dramas that are not tragic, there is really no approach to triviality in the whole matter. The work is as well freighted with significance and thoughtfulness as Sir Henry Taylor's other works are. The two girls, Rosalba and Fior-deliza, recall the contrast of womanhood shown in *Philip Van Artevelde* between the sweet and tender Adriana and the quick, sprightly Clara, no less tender at heart for her lightness of manner; and both contrasts recall again that immortal counterpoint of human delineation executed by Shakespeare in Hero and Beatrice. But none of these four heroines of our own day go close enough to Shakespeare's to lose their own self-sufficiency and individuality, any more than Silisco and Ruggiero in *A Sicilian Summer* lack original personality, or fatherhood to fine sayings, while showing clear relationships of manner and circumstance with the men of *The Merchant of Venice*. Ruggiero's caution to the players is capitally put:

‘and might I speak
My untought mind to you that know your art,
I should beseech you not to stare and gasp
And quiver, that the infection of the sense

May make our flesh to creep; for as the hand
 By tickling of our skin may make us laugh
 More than the wit of Plautus, so these tricks
 May make us shudder. But true art is this,
 To set aside your sorrowful pantomime,
 Pass by the senses, leave the flesh at rest,
 And working by the witcheries of words
 Felt in the fulness of their import, call
 Men's spirits from the deep; that pain may thus
 Be glorified, and passion flashing out
 Like noiseless lightning in a summer's night,
 Show Nature in her bounds from peak to chasm,
 Awful, but not terrific.'

And again, his comment on a speech about to be pronounced is admirably good as a piece of critical wisdom :

' 'Tis a speech
 That by a language of familiar lowness
 Enhances what of more heroic vein
 Is next to follow. But one fault it hath :
 It fits too close to life's realities,
 In truth to Nature missing truth to Art;
 For Art commends not counterparts and copies,
 But from our life a nobler life would shape,
 Bodies celestial from terrestrial raise,
 And teach us, not jejune what we are,
 But what we may be when the Parian block
 Yields to the hand of Phidias.'

The story of this play is extremely interesting,—a mere love story without any harrowing tragedy, and charmingly sustained and suspended. Its sprightliness is always distinct from levity, and its seriousness always distinct from heaviness.

St. Clement's Eve, the latest of this series of sterling works (1862), does not seem to me to be quite as firmly put together or as largely carried out as any

of its forerunners, although the picture it gives of French affairs in the reign of Charles le Fou is vivid and excellent. There is something of a *fatigued* brevity about it; and some portions are too uneventful and unimportant to fit in greatly with the rest. The catastrophe, however, is splendid; and the Duke of Orleans, as well as the villain of the piece, the Bastard of Montargis, are portraits fully worthy of the artist's fine portrait gallery.

Sir Henry Taylor's relationship to the dramatists of the Elizabethan period is of much the same nature as Mr. Horne's,—evident, not by any minute and laboured imitation such as would betray weakness or lack of originality, but by an adherence to the incomparable dramatic method of those men, to their traditions of feudal pageant and large action, and to something of their pleasing magniloquence. And yet our two contemporary Elizabethans are as different in many essential matters as two artists can be. In Mr. Horne's plays there is a fiery impetuosity that we never meet with in Sir Henry Taylor's, where, however, it is replaced by a sustained calmness of power in shaping actions largely and truly. In Sir Henry Taylor's we note the excellent faculty of waiting and controlling and remodelling and binding, carried to results of remarkable completeness: in Mr. Horne's we note the opposite faculty of rushing mentally through an action, throwing it into a great

shape with impetuous rapidity, and then leaving the result in a state satisfying enough to the reader, but which fails by a long way to satisfy the author on calm revision; and thus it is that in three of his best works, some of the best things have been published subsequently to the first issue. In Sir Henry Taylor's plays there is often a little too much good material, if anything. In Mr. Horne's there is often not as much as one could wish, though there is never any salient incompleteness. Sir Henry Taylor occasionally overdoes to some extent that florid rhetoric that marks much Elizabethan work; while Mr. Horne never, except with a very clear and special artistic purpose, becomes studiously and stiffly rhetorical and often rises to a tense significance of expression that is not found in the other works except on rare occasions.

What we have most to thank Sir Henry Taylor for is the large and statesmanlike intelligence with which, in each of his five* historical plays, he has studied and mastered a historical situation of no mean significance, and the large and craftsmanlike intelligence with which he has embodied the situation in each instance when mastered. He carries us with him to the times and places of his plays and sets us in the midst of stir and turbulence, shows us

* I am of course counting *Philip* as two, because it is not only two plays but treats two distinct historical situations.

individual life at struggle amid the throes of national life, and gives us the supreme enjoyment that dramatists above all men can give us, of standing 'calm and supercilious' among the lifelike movements of a mimic world, to pass away at will out of its turmoil and agony and bloodshed—keeping the pleasure and the lessons and the knowledge, and leaving the pain behind.

XVII.

GEORGE ELIOT.

'The artist's part is both to be and do,
Transfixing with a special, central power
The flat experience of the common man,
And turning outward, with a sudden wrench,
Half agony, half ecstasy, the thing
He feels the inmost,—never felt the less
Because he sings it.' E. B. BROWNING.

'The best singer is not the one who has the most lithe and powerful organ . . . the pleasure of poems is not in them that take the handsomest measure and similes and sound. Without effort and without exposing in the least how it is done the greatest poet brings the spirit of any or all events and passions and scenes and persons some more some less to bear on your individual character as you hear or read. To do this well is to compete with the laws that pursue and follow time.'—WALT WHITMAN.

GEORGE ELIOT.

ALTHOUGH this volume is mainly devoted to the discussion of poetry, it is hardly necessary to crave pardon for the following passages so far as they may seem to diverge from the subject in hand and treat of the totally distinct subject of modern fiction. On the view here adopted the divergence is not such a great one as it would seem at a hasty glance to be: neither is it avoidable; for it is impossible to write a book which shall approach to a complete treatment of the subject of 'our living poets' without including the name of George Eliot; and yet the title is accorded to her here rather in consideration of her prose works than of those that take poetic form. But even supposing that none of the novels existed, it would be the greatest affectation to leave unmentioned such a work as *The Spanish Gypsy* (on a large scale) or as *Agatha* (on a small scale).

There can be no doubt, if we consider the matter closely, that the tenure upon which a supreme novelist holds his fame is analogous to that on which the poet's position is grounded, if not identical with it; but the question is, How far is a novelist, at best,

to be regarded as a *poet*? since that designation is, perhaps, the most coveted distinction humanity has to confer. If the reader bear in mind the remarks made in the Introduction, on the relative value of idealisation and expression and on the distinctions between the prose and poetic methods, he will probably not deem it a very lax liberality to use the term 'poet' in a somewhat larger sense than is usual, and confer it on any novelist who should produce a work abounding in those touches of well-marked sympathy with all animate and inanimate nature, always observable in poets—a work not made up of literal scenic transcripts from life tossed together, but composed of parts of sufficiently modified relation to meet the exigencies of striking beauty—a work in which the characters are sketched with sufficient idealising force to make them real and vital—a work inculcating noble views when didactic, and the whole expressed in style at once individual, choice, and assimilative of such of the elements of poetic style as can be utilised in prose without affectation. A fine work in prose, too, is eminently suited to the present day, and when pure and noble is calculated to do more good to the average English mind than an equally pure and noble work in the poetic method, as distinguished by the attribute of condensation. The most pregnant poems frequently make a certain demand on the intellect, which must be met before the heart can be effectually

come at. But when the prose method is adopted, a work is thoroughly self-explanatory; and though delicate artistic beauties continue to dawn freshly on each fresh reading of a great book, we generally meet with nothing that staggers even the simplest adult intelligence. In an age characterised as this is by hurry of business and strain of mind in every-day life, this perspicuity in works of art is obviously a great advantage, inasmuch as it readily meets the demand of the overstrained mind for relaxation. The average quality of modern fiction is so low, that a splendid premium is held out to an author who should take up this most popular form of art, and, without administering irritants to the wide-spread and craving ulcer of sensationalism, succeed in chaining the attention and winning the suffrages of the public by force of true art. If 'the good, the beautiful, and the true,' can be embodied in a prose work of art with wider effect than in verse, the artist who, electing to address the wider circle, attains supremacy, can hardly be called upon to take rank second to any artist on the mere ground that prose is not verse.

It would be invidious to say that, of contemporary English novelists, only one has attained to a thoroughly high and noble ideal, and to a style at once individual and greatly artistic; and yet, if asked where to seek this combination of qualities, I should be at a loss to know whither to turn unless to the

novels of George Eliot. The formation of this style may be distinctly traced from her earliest works to complete perfection. In the *Scenes of Clerical Life* the language is decidedly elegant and superior: in *Adam Bede* there is a marked increase of vigour, and a superaddition of proper and comely ornament; but it is in *The Mill on the Floss* that we first find the perfect ease, grace, vigour, and propriety of ornament which characterise the author's fully developed power. In *Silas Marner* there is a certain large repose, attributable to the subject rather than to any change of style; and in *Romola* the same great powers are merely turned to another use in the supreme treatment of an Italian Renaissance subject: there is no radical change of style in *Romola*; nor is there in *Felix Holt*, wherein the artist is again on the old familiar English ground.

In broad contrast with the sensational school, the novels of George Eliot are not dependent for their interest on any flimsy effectism of plot, or on any appeals to the morbid appetite for what is horrible and unnatural. When we take up one of her books we cannot possibly leave it unfinished; but this is not because the chain of circumstances depicted is of a complicated nature, pregnant with stimulus of marvels, such as to awaken curiosity in regard to the dénouement, or because any page is delightful reading. The important point of attachment between the

writer and reader is in the fact that the characters are so treated that we actually feel as if they were beings present to our sense, and whom it were good for us to see as far on their way as the artist permits us. We never find ourselves stimulated to a base thought or feeling towards any of the men and women in these books, although George Eliot is keen in sarcasm and satire, and paints a fair proportion of erring characters and even criminals; and this state of the reader's mind arises from the fact that the satire and sarcasm are always genial, while the evil qualities of the personages are placed in such surroundings of circumstance and character, that pity is awakened where hatred or contempt might have been called forth by a less noble artist. The passing prosperity of handsome scapegraces is never here seized on and depicted as a stable thing: throughout these works glooms the inexorable Nemesis, which all who diverge from the path of strict rectitude create and preserve for themselves. Never does the author lose the sense of what should be eternally kept in mind—the fact that an evil done cannot be undone, but leads to innumerable unforeseen consequences—the fact best expressed in her own epigram, 'Children may be strangled—deeds never.' This Nemesis, too, is not merely depicted as attendant on great crimes; but we are constantly learning how terrible may be the consequences of little lapses from the course of duty—

*It is easy
to preach
how to
right
H. Lewis*

an idea which it is important to impress in art, inasmuch as life never affords sufficiently piquant examples, on account of the natural tendency of the mind to forget what when it happens appears unimportant. A profound and minute analyst of human nature, with a keen objective perception of externals of scene and action, she has, farther, a large faculty for philosophising; and to bring these various qualities into harmonious action, there is no more excellent vehicle than the contemporary novel in its highest perfection of structure and style. Again, her mind teems with modern notions—is essentially a full-blown product of the present century from a philosophic point of view—as the novel compounded of dialogue, description, and analysis, presented in one clear medium of idealised prose, is essentially a full-blown product of the present century from an esthetic point of view.

The many great and noble lessons which George Eliot directly inculcates at times, when her work is didactic, are such as only the very thoughtful could draw from observation of life, simply because the circumstances to be deduced from are either very difficult of observation, or not adaptable for retention in the average memory. But such is the power of this artist that, when a character in one of her works does a great thing, or gains a great victory over self, the circumstance has a value as far transcending the value of mere precept as that of real example does;

and a terrible consequence under her treatment conveys a warning as solemn and vivid as most of us ever experience, and without the fearful disadvantage of being too late. This could not be the case unless the characters and scenes were made perfectly real—‘complete and all alive;’ and again completeness and life are results which can only be attained by perfect mastery over the method of depicting. It is thus evident, without any detailed criticism of her works, that George Eliot has a special and decided faculty for the prose method of expression: this faculty detracts no jot from the *poetry* of her novels, but, with years of nobly honest art-labour, has been developed into a perfection of utterance impossible to improve upon.

To all who prized her novels at this high rate there was discomfort in the idea that she would one day take to the poetic or dramatic walk of literature—an idea broached some years ago in an article written *à propos* of the publication of *Felix Holt*, and on the correct assumption that the fragments of verse at the heads of various chapters of that book were by the author. The idea was uncomfortable simply on account of the immense difficulty which artists have ever betrayed in effecting radical changes of method when once thoroughly perfect in the practice of any one mode or method of art. We hardly know of a single instance of an artist who attained the goal of

perfection in more walks of art than one. 'What of Raphael's sonnets, Dante's picture?' Truly we have not either to canvass for an answer to the question. But we have Raphael's sculpture; and what is it when compared with Michelangelo's, or with the pictorial produce of his own vast genius?

Had there been anything tentative or imperfect about the prose writings of George Eliot, the possibility of a change of method need have had no terrors; but there were her works facing us, compact and perfect. Prose had done what prose could—and not mean are its possibilities—to yield us works of high art, full of strength, beauty, nobleness, and vitality, and showing an inherency of faculty as well defined and as minutely elaborated in practice as is the case in the works of great poets. Looking at this fact, the suggestion that the splendid and capacious vehicle for great thoughts and feelings and large delineations might be at some time or other cast aside, could not be admitted without bringing in its train ugly dreams of the failure of other artists to change after attaining perfection.

Much of George Eliot's prose writing is kept just on the verge of verse, at the extreme pitch of poetry in prose; and this is perhaps one of her greatest merits in workmanship. To one with a complete command of language the mere transit from prose to blank verse presents no difficulty, but is often a

relief; and the great feat, when under the excitement of working prose artistically, is to keep it true to prose principles without betraying any effort. The best artistic prose for passages where the theme demands fervour is that which, without being actually rhythmic, like many of Mr. Swinburne's choice passages, has a sufficiently obvious muscular undulation to show that the writer was keeping a metrical impulse well in hand when he wrote it. Direct and marked rhythm in prose is an annoyance if persisted in; but it is impossible for an artist in words not to have the craving for rhythm. There is no art without enthusiasm, and enthusiasm in language is very liable to run into verse. Nevertheless, the writer of high fiction who aims highest will rigidly curb any fervour that would lead him close enough to the channels of verse to give an inevitable direction of his phrases into them. Now George Eliot's prose shows not only the faculty to become metrical—that were a small thing—but also a lofty reticence of metre, which is one of the most exalted qualities of her style from a technical point of view; and this quality, far from pointing to poetry strictly so called as her legitimate work, merely indicates her supreme ability to write high prose, or, as it might well be termed, poetry in prose.

The latter-day movement made in the scientific world towards the perfection of the science of psy-

chology has been accompanied by a movement in the artistic world twofold in its manifestation—the elaboration of the psychological school of poetry, and the formation of the analytical school of prose fiction. The imperfection of the works of this school taken as a whole is a matter of course; but the mind of George Eliot would seem to be such as to have rendered her peculiarly fit to give the movement an irresistible leadership in its prose manifestation. Into that path of the twofold movement she stepped, and became *facile princeps*; and it was this peculiar and marked adaptation of a special mind to a special work that excited misgivings as to the results of any deviation from that path towards the other. Close as are the two paths, the barriers between them are strong and high, and the strongest runner is almost sure to lose force in attempting to overleap them. For doubtless all true artists grow up with some strong and special bent, demanding only fitness of circumstance to develop it into a full-blown faculty or power; and this is all that is implied when one says of a man that he is ‘born a painter’ or ‘born a poet.’ To one who can be supreme in any one manner of art, it is failure to fall short of supremacy in another; and assuredly perfection in one direction is hardly too little for the occupation of one mind and life. The work of a great mind must always be a great work; and, whatever method of expression a

true artist may adopt, competent judges are sure to be able to detect the greatness of his ideal, even when he has abandoned the form of expression natural to him, and adopted one unfamiliar. But in order that a work of art may be beneficial in a degree corresponding with the greatness of the mind conceiving it, it must be executed in entire conformity with beauty,—as it is not likely to be if the artist steps out of his usual sphere to compass the embodiment of his concept. It must be remembered that it is only the specially-studious few who analyse works of art, and hold with themselves esthetic discussions. But the unreflective many are keenly alive to the influences of supreme beauty; and the greater number of those in whom a work of art bears fruit, unconsciously assimilate truth and purity while drinking in this external beauty, so difficult to produce in an alien method, and the love of which is, next to the love of human beings, the most refining of human influences.

In the charming headings to the chapters of *Felix Holt* it seemed as though the strong hand which had, up to that point, exercised masterly control over the restive tendency of high prose to rear up into verse, had relaxed itself just for the sake of a holiday, and no more. These headings did not bear the stamp of original poetry upon them. Forcible as were some, and admirable in thought and applica-

bility to the respective chapters as were all, none bore traces of that clearly-defined individuality of style betrayed by all great and accomplished practitioners of verse, in even so small a compass as these headings. Some of them possess the great distinctive technical mark of poetry, condensation; but this very condensation is compassed not in an original and individual method, but in the method of some pre-existent model; and it is hardly necessary to enforce that power of assimilation or reproduction, however large, is no infallible index of self-existent poetic faculty. In the *Felix Holt* headings are to be found lines which might easily pass for Shakespeare's, as in the slip of dialogue over chapter v.:

'1st Citizen. Sir, there's a hurry in the veins of youth
That makes a vice of virtue by excess.

2d Citizen. What if the coolness of our tardier veins
Be loss of virtue?

1st Citizen. All things cool with time—
The sun itself, they say, till heat shall find
A general level, nowhere in excess.

2d Citizen. 'Tis a poor climax, to my weaker thought,
That future middlingness.'

Here there is just that solid, thoughtful undercurrent to a racy exterior that makes so much of Shakespeare's sparkling dialogue memorable as well as pleasurable, imparting to it the quality which serves to relegate to the world of proverbs so much of his that is dashing and rapid. And passages of this stamp by George Eliot are valued not for the excel-

lence of the assimilation to Shakespearian expression, but for the pregnancy of the thought. At the head of chapter xvii. is a piece of epigrammatic writing as well packed with significance as a cutting from *Hudibras*, and in the same metre; but in this, again, we get no earnest of marked poetic faculty:

‘It is a good and soothfast saw;
Half-roasted never will be raw;
No dough is dried once more to meal,
No crock new-shapen by the wheel;
You can’t turn curds to milk again,
Nor Now, by wishing, back to Then;
And having tasted stolen honey,
You can’t buy innocence for money.’

Various names arise to our lips as we skim along the heads of the chapters, and always good names. On one occasion (chapter iii.) the mild and thoughtful face of Wordsworth in a delicious idyllic mood comes before our eyes. Two or three times in flitting from page to page you may get a powerful odour of the manner of Mrs. Browning: one of these suggestions is at chapter xiv., and another at chapter xlvi.; and with regard to both these passages, it is easy to imagine that any one turning over the leaves of *Felix Holt* would speculate from what unfamiliar page of *Aurora Leigh* these two choice morsels had been culled. In one instance there is a marvel of assimilative faculty, namely at chapter xxxiv.: the exquisite manipulation of the five lines set there as motto seem to suggest some fragment of speech dropped

from the mouth of an *CEnone* grown gray in her wild passion, and transferred from windy, many-fountained *Ida* to some cold, colourless waste of land :

‘The fields are hoary with December’s frost.
I too am hoary with the chills of age.
But through the fields and through the untrodden woods
Is rest and stillness—only in my heart
The pall of winter shrouds a throbbing life.’

It is of course not intended to insinuate that George Eliot has plagiarised the expressions of any other poet; but in judging whether a poem is to be regarded as truly and unmistakably poetic in expression, it is a good plan for a critic to bring together such passages as are most striking; and, having ranged them before him, he can decide whether in his judgment they constitute a manner of expression original as well as beautiful. This method of procedure seems to show in *The Spanish Gypsy*, as in the *Felix Holt* mottoes, that such poetic style as the author has developed has been the result of the unconsciously assimilative faculty. Such is frequently the case with writers of intense poetic feeling, whose mode of expression is other than the poetic mode. A happy thought comes, and is happily expressed; but when analysed technically, it is found to be expressed as A or B would have expressed it, had his mind been the fortunate nursing-ground of the idea;—not that the actual possessor of the idea has borrowed a single word from A or B, but that antecedent familiarity

with A's or B's work has stamped certain forms or lines of speech on a mind which, if occupied by a poetic equipment of its own, would not have assimilated such lines or forms. And thus it is that we meet in *The Spanish Gypsy* passages which, without perhaps a definite resemblance to any special passage by another poet, are so distinctly in a manner associated with some well-known name that, had we met them as detached quotations, we should have said, 'Tennyson,' 'Shakespeare,' 'Mrs. Browning,' 'Shelley,' as the case might be. Who, for instance, would not take these exquisite lines for the product of the Laureate's mind?—

'Through all her frame there ran the shock
Of some sharp-wounding joy, like his who hastes
And dreads to come too late, and comes in time
To press a loved hand dying.'

Not only does the ring of the words recall Tennyson, but there is that Tennysonian structure which gives an inevitable rhythmic flow, divide the words into lines how you will. Write the passage thus—

'Through all her frame
There ran the shock of some sharp-wounding joy,
Like his who hastes and dreads to come too late,
And comes in time to press a loved hand dying'—

and you get scansion as distinct and pure as before, though not quite so stately. The names most frequently forced on the mind in connection with matters of expression in *The Spanish Gypsy* are, how-

ever, Shakespeare and Mrs. Browning. The following lines are peculiarly suggestive of the great poetess :

‘ all deities,
Thronging Olympus in fine attitudes ;
Or all hell's heroes whom the poet saw
Tremble like lions, writhe like demigods.’

And when we read further on—

‘ One pulse of Time makes the base hollow,—sends
The towering certainty we built so high
Toppling in fragments meaningless,’

we are forced by identity of metaphor to revert to some lines in *Aurora Leigh*, describing Romney (in far less elegant terms, truly) as a man who

‘ builds his goodness up
So high, it topples down to the other side
And makes a sort of badness.’

Even Milton is not unrepresented, as witness the line ‘ When with obliquely soaring bend altern ;’ and of Shakespearian cuttings from this poem, by one of the most Shakespearian of modern authors, it would be easy to give a long array ; but I must desist.

An appraisal of the lyrics of *The Spanish Gypsy* yields a result similar to that obtained by examining the scattered passages of pointed beauty—that is to say, the songs do not support a claim to self-sufficiency in the matter of lyrical expression : charmingly thoughtful as are many of the songs of this volume, hardly any come up to the standard of lyrical excellence which we should demand of a new poet as

a diploma-condition. All are easy and graceful in expression; but there is more accomplishment than fire in them: they do not, like the songs of *The Princess*, or some of the smaller pieces of Browning, or, above all, the lyrical portions of Shelley's *Prometheus*, fix themselves upon us with that irresistible ring that keeps up a stream of unconscious music in the mind, which we find breaking out from time to time in some snatch of verse, coming suddenly to our lips without, perhaps, our knowing or caring whence. And in lyrical poetry, this musical importunity is a quality which we expect to meet with.

As great stress was laid, in my introduction, on the polarising of language as an element of poetic style, it may naturally be asked what, in that respect, is elicited by searching the pages of *The Spanish Gypsy*. To tell the truth, I have only discovered two instances in which any use has been made of this instrument of the poet. In one case, Don Silva is described as 'too proudly special for obedience'—a happy term wherein the force of the word *special* exceeds by a degree its usual value. In the other case, Prior Isidor, reproaching Don Silva, exclaims—

'O fallen knighthood, penitent of high vows!'

Here, the word *penitent* is placed in such unusual company as to convey an intensified sarcasm highly artistic in its propriety under the circumstances of the dialogue, throughout which the Prior has been

working himself up to a higher and higher pitch of bitter invective.

It would be absurd to say that *The Spanish Gypsy* is devoid of individualities of expression such as would help to make up a style. Indeed there are numerous minutiae of utterance, scattered throughout it, which are unmistakably born and bred in the most original recesses of this most original mind. But while such happy thoughts as that '*vicious crawling things are pretty eggs*' in '*love's spring*,' or that '*small legs and arms with pleasant agitation purposeless go up and down like pretty fruits in gales*,'—such comparisons as that of little Pepe's '*small Semitic nose*' to '*a new-born minnow*,'—are individual and pointed, and would show well in the excellent setting of a page of George Eliot's high prose, they have scarcely sufficient intensity to grace the more exacting setting of verse; and indeed they are a little below the dignity blank verse assumes with its inexpressible afflatus—the inevitable accompaniment of any serious attempt at poetry strictly so called. In the greater part of the work this afflatus itself is lacking: there often seems to be no good reason why the matter in hand should have been divided into lines rather than into paragraphs; and indeed it is not at all clear that many passages would not gain force by being presented in a prose paragraph; inasmuch as the words are often not con-

densed into blank verse, but simply *distributed* in that form. They fall fluently and perspicuously into iambic lines; but the great majority of these lines have not light and shade, and points of special interest as regards structure, to justify their existence as separate individuals rather than in the commonwealth of a paragraph. The absence of condensation in any passage may be readily tested by the interpolation of half-a-dozen insignificant words, with the view of eliminating the rhythmic sequence; and on the plea of experiment one may perhaps venture to print a passage in a paragraph with the interpolated words required for the abolition of metre marked by italics:

'Do you hear the trumpet? There *is* old Ramon's blast. No bray but his can shake the air so well. He takes his trumpeting as solemnly as *an* angel charged to wake the dead; thinks war was made for trumpeters, and *that* their great art *was* made solely for themselves who understand it. His features all have shaped themselves to blowing, and when his trumpet *is* either bagged or left at home he seems *like* a chattel in a broker's booth, a spoutless watering-can, a promise to pay no sum particular.'

Here we have merely inserted the six insignificant words, *do, an, that, was, either, and like*, and twice restored the *i* to *is* where the author had left an apostrophe to serve for it. Yet the passage would surely be read by any one who saw it for the first time without any suspicion that it merely required the excision of six little words and two letters to transform it to verse; no single expression betraying the secret that the passage is from a poem. Now, for another ex-

periment, make a random cutting of equal length from a work in the strictly poetic method, and take precisely the same liberty with it that has been taken here. Let it be from Browning, who has hardly written any prose, and whose few attempts to struggle out of the glorious bondage of verse have not been greatly successful. *Sordello* shall furnish what is wanted: here is the address to Shelley, from the poem:

‘I need not fear this audience, I make free with *all* of them, but then this is no place for thee! The thunder-phrase of *Æschylus* the Athenian, grown up out of *his* memories of Marathon, would echo like his own sword’s griding screech braying a Persian shield,—the silver speech of Sidney’s self, the starry paladin, *would* turn intense as *the blast* of a trumpet sounding in the knights to tilt,—wert thou to hear! What heart have I to play my puppets, to bear my part before these worthies?’

Here it has been needful to interpolate nine words before the form could be effectually ruined; but it needs not that these be eliminated, and that the form be restored, to show even any one who does not know this, or any passage of Browning, that this is poetry. The expressions *thunder-phrase*, *griding screech*, *braying* (as applied to the stroke of a sword on a shield), *silver speech*, *starry paladin*, and *intense* (as here used), all speak for themselves, and all convey an intensified music of sound, together with rich suggestiveness of sense, not to name the pithy poetic summary of the soldier-dramatist *Æschylus*.

The form of *The Spanish Gypsy* it is difficult to

regard as anything but a mistake. It may be a narrow view, but it seems to me that dramatic work, such as the dialogues of this book, loses tone at once by the introduction of blank-verse descriptions and reflections woven closely into the fabric, and even by the amplification of prose stage-directions to the dimensions they assume in *The Spanish Gypsy*. In the very best scene (which, by the bye, is for the most part in prose)—the scene wherein Juan is robbed by gypsy girls of various articles of finery, and gets them back by means of music—this feature of construction is prominent, and one cannot but wish that so charming a scene had been managed, as it easily might, with far less of stage-direction. Condensed meaning might have been gained, and perspicuity might have remained unimpaired, by the elimination of a large fraction of these directions, and the transference of another fraction to the fabric of the dialogue.

To those who take a deep interest in the question of George Eliot's becoming a distinguished poet as well as *prosateur*, one of the most unsatisfactory symptoms is the actual texture of the blank verse. Large, easy, and unfaltering (though somewhat irregular) in flow, rich and deep in colour, there is yet a lack of *make* in the great bulk of the lines, that it is most difficult to define and yet impossible not to feel. In any fair average sample of the *texture* of the book, the lines lack that tessellated exquisiteness of compo-

sition which abounds in Tennyson, and is found in two small passages of George Eliot's verse, already quoted, and both remarkably Tennysonian.

To tell a tale in verse in the prose method is fatal in one respect. Few authors have the temerity to carry a work in verse to as great a length as a work in prose; and in reducing to the necessary limits a work in verse which is not thoroughly poetic in method—not thoroughly condensed in expression—the danger is that much will be left out which, if told out in prose, would save the characters from the great fault of shadowiness. Some such fatal error, I venture to submit, attended the production of *The Spanish Gypsy*, in which the characters are too vague, too mere embodiments of noble thoughts and sentiments: they do not take a living and active place in our minds as do the Marners and Maggies, the Dodsons and Tullivers, and all the persons of George Eliot's other books. As we pass from page to page, we do not fail to find thought piled on thought, speaking of one atmosphere and one alone—the wide, free, exhilarating atmosphere of mind in which such favourite ‘companions of our solitude’ as Nancy Lammeter, the barber Nello, Mrs. Poyser, Bob Jakin, &c., all lived and moved and had their being before they were sent forth to live the larger life they have since entered upon—the wide life in a world's mind. But the new people that we expect to meet when we take up a

work by George Eliot—where are they? What has become of them when we close the book? We have indeed one new friend whose presence we can feel, and whose identity takes its place in the long ranks of identities standing boldly out from the pages of the six novels: we have indeed the vital, air-breathing, heart-winning Juan; but where do the rest go? They seem to troop past us like a graveyard host, and leave on the mind merely the shadowy semblance of a manhood extinguished on the eve of development into a powerful instrument—a womanhood ‘crushed in the clash of jarring claims’—a priesthood suffering and making others suffer in the cause of religion—another manhood lost in the weakness of self-indulgence. Zarca, Fedalma, Isidor, Silva, do not rest with us as other than vehicles for noble ideas and exponents of noble sentiments: muscle and blood are lacking in the tale of their endowments: they all seem more or less afflicted with that *anæmia* which inevitably arises from a mistaken method—a method in which the artist is not sufficiently at home to produce live men and women in it. Juan has more actual prose in his treatment than the rest have; and in his speeches, as well as in the descriptive passages relating to him, there is far more appearance than elsewhere of the old manner of speech, even though meted out into blank verse. Juan certainly lives distinctly before us, and better recalls the dramatic

breadth of Shakespeare than anything in the book. Whatever he says is thoroughly characteristic: his various figurings before us furnish a homogeneous series of aspects which make up an evident man—and that a very noble one. His nobility consists chiefly in a pure and disinterested devotion to Fedalma, and a genial kindliness to every one, together with a cheerful acceptance of the position in life which places him out of all possibility of reward for his devotedness. The book is evidently framed with a view to being as unsuitable for the stage as possible: interspersed as the dialogues are with analytical and descriptive passages spoken in the author's own person, the work would lose an indispensable tithe of its significance if played merely as the characters speak for themselves in its pages; and it would require dramatising in the same degree and in the same sense as an ordinary novel requires to have that operation performed to fit it for stage purposes. It is very intelligible that an artist of a high class should wish to avoid the remote contingency of being made to figure on a degenerate stage such as ours. Still, the drama and the stage are subjectively so intimate in relationship, that a fine drama is usually found to meet the exigencies of the stage. So with Juan—the scenes in which he is introduced are not only fuller of dramatic portraiture, but also more instinct with dramatic life, and that

most difficult thing to treat in the drama, motion. Take, for instance, the beautiful scene among the gypsies, already referred to: how full it is of motion, as well as deep thought and exquisite portraiture. Except for the uncomfortableness involved in the copious stage-directions, the scene may be compared with the great episode of the 'Rainbow' tavern in *Silas Marner*, to which it is equal in idealising force, though not in variety of character. It would be of great experimental interest to ascertain with how little verbal and structural alteration this scene of Juan and the gypsies might be reduced to the pure prose perfection of the 'Rainbow' scene, and what would be the extent of the converse modification in reducing the 'Rainbow' episode to a scene on the other model.

The Spanish Gypsy is as full of epigrammatic point and splendour as the novels; nor is it a whit behind them in wealth of short passages to be laid away in the mind's treasure-house, and kept for use as well as pleasure. Here are four pregnant lines, for instance:

'Conscience is harder than our enemies,
Knows more, accuses with more nicety,
Nor needs to question Rumour if we fall
Below the perfect model of our thought.'

Again, we may go a very long journey through literature without lighting on such a thought as this:

'Nay, never falter : no great deed is done
By falterers who ask for certainty.
No good is certain, but the steadfast mind,
The undivided will to seek the good :
'Tis that compels the elements, and wrings
A human music from the indifferent air.
The greatest gift the hero leaves his race
Is to have been a hero. Say we fail !—
We feed the high tradition of the world. . .'

The plot of the book affords what George Eliot always takes care to find—ample material for the setting forth of the inexorable weight of antecedent circumstance, and for the inculcation of the great duty of self-renunciation. Fedalma sacrifices herself uncomplainingly because convinced, like Maggy Tulliver, that her path of duty lies in self-sacrifice. Silva, on the contrary, is unable to submit to the large march of circumstance, and, in his ineffectual struggle to assert his own life, mars the great project of a great soul, flings off his own high responsibilities, and, by his inability to carry out the lower part he has chosen, sets aside the possibility of consummating his desires even at the sacrifice he has elected to make. The philosophical resources of the plot are made use of to the utmost. The amount of discussion which finds utterance in the poem, equally with the valuable analyses of mental phenomena, are nothing less than startling. The highest poetical qualities George Eliot has not before failed of reaching—those qualities summed up under the head of idealisation—she has here grasped with a hand strong as

ever. But it is the seeker after the technical beauties of poetry who, when he comes to these pages, is not satisfied in a degree nearly approaching that in which the seeker for the technical beauties of high prose is satisfied in her former works. To students and those who have assimilated the code of morality implied in George Eliot's works, this production must ever be dear for intimate companionship, as affording innumerable new renderings of the great sentiments of the author; but by the *dilettante* and the stickler for unity of form, it will never probably be greatly loved. It is, of course, not desired to erect popularity as the final criterion of excellence in judging of a work of art of such high feeling and subtle intellectuality; but we may safely say that, had the subject been treated in prose, a large and intelligent class of readers now unappealed to would have come readily within the influence of the work.

It is of course not beyond hope that we may yet get novels from George Eliot, although the fact that all she has published since *Felix Holt** has been in verse argues against such a hope. Of the three smaller poems *How Lisa Loved the King*, *Agatha*, and *The Legend of Jubal*, there is not a great deal to say. The first is a story from Boccaccio, versified in a style that has less attraction than much of the poetry we had already had from the author, while the

* Except the 'Address to Working Men.'

Legend, exceedingly original and splendid in thought, and full of beautiful passages, suggested a new influence in method—that of Mr. Morris: the line,

‘And that no night was ever like this night’

would have passed very well for a line of *Jason* or *The Earthly Paradise*. *Agatha* takes a different standing: it is far finer in form than any poem by the same hand—much more nearly approaches perfection. As it is but little known here, having been published in an American magazine (the *Atlantic Monthly*), a few words about it may fitly close this essay. It is matter for regret that it is not better known in England, for, like other works of the author, it is full of a particular broad thoughtfulness which no head but one could have embodied in a work of literary art. It is in form a sketch of nature and life from the Black Forest district. We are invited, in the prelude, to accompany the poet—

‘to the mountain, not where rocks
Soar harsh above the troops of hurrying pines,
But where the earth spreads soft and rounded breasts
To feed her children;’

and we are then introduced to the lowly cottage where poor old *Agatha*, the helpful hand-maiden of fellow-villagers in general, lives and gives a home to two poorer cousins. The interior of this cottage being placed before us with a Dutch perfection of detail, whereof the precise analogue is to be found almost

anywhere in the novels of George Eliot, but not elsewhere, the Countess Linda is presented to us—a young countess who comes to visit the old maid: then follows a dialogue, of beautiful simplicity, which is yet full of noble thought, skilfully placed for the most part in the mouth of the simple old woman. In sketching the outer and inner life of an aged maiden, typical, like Agatha, of a large class, the artist but follows that delicate and lofty instinct which has led her once and again to aggrandise and ‘prove illustrious’ all life that is pure, even though lowly, and all work that is nobly done, however ignoble the intrinsic quality; but in this poem there is yet more; for the religion of the peasantry is woven with a dainty though firm hand into the fabric of the whole piece; and we are made to feel, as we have been more recently by the descriptions of the Ober-Ammergau Passion Play, how vital the medieval form of faith still is among certain contemporaries, who adhere closely and in all simple-mindedness, not to its gorgeous ritual and its elaborate dogmas, but to all the most human of its traits. The completeness with which a broad and lofty intelligence, holding all great ideas in full light, and comprehending the essences of religions, can sink itself so as to find the terms wherein such and such grand facts and thoughts would suggest themselves to a soul of primitive simplicity, is strikingly exemplified in several passages

of this poem, and notably in Agatha's description of the effect a certain pilgrimage had in enlarging her idea of antecedent time :

'The time! the time! It never seemed far back,
Only to father's father and his kin
That lived before him. But the time stretched out
After that pilgrimage: I seemed to see
Far back, and yet I knew time lay behind,
As there are countries lying still behind
The highest mountains, there in Switzerland.
O, it is great to go on pilgrimage!'

The same tender care for Christian legend and history which the artist shows, in her prelude, in recalling the sweet story of the Magdalen, comparing Countess Linda's hair to

'hers who made the wavy lengths once speak
The grateful worship of a rescued soul,'

is shown also in the dialogue in various Catholic ideas, well selected for their humanness from among the multiplicity, and again in a lyric which closes the piece, and is described as a song *growing from out the life* of the peasantry. Agatha's reasons for and against praying are very characteristic :

'Oft I think my prayers
Are foolish, feeble things; for Christ is good
Whether I pray or not,—the Virgin's heart
Is kinder far than mine; and then I stop
And feel I can do naught towards helping men,
Till out it comes, like tears that will not hold,
And I must pray again for all the world.'

And almost more beautiful is the simple aspiration

and trust of her reply to the Countess's doubt whether the poor old lady's sins can be very heavy—

'Nay, but they may be greater than I know;
'Tis but dim light I see by. So I try
All ways I know of to be cleansed and pure.
I would not sink where evil spirits are.
There's perfect goodness somewhere: so I strive.'

But the piece rises to an artistic climax in the terminal song, whose burden of 'quaintly mingled mirth and piety' is spread over its ten stanzas with perfect grace, covering much profound thought. Through all its choric out-breathings to saints, this song shows that power which George Eliot possesses in so exceptional a measure, to grasp the essentially human element of an idea; and whether we read—

'Holy Babe, our God and Brother,
Bind us fast to one another!'

or,

'Good Saint Joseph, faithful spouse,
Help us all to keep our vows!'

the same thought will assert itself that the old faith remains vital yet, by virtue of its human essences, among men and women who have had no opportunity to climb to a higher, more intellectually founded, and more demonstrable form of religion. Such attempts as that so successfully made in this little poem—to present acceptably to all classes pictures of living belief—active, and active for good in the life of the individual—are no new thing to George Eliot, but are

among the great beauties of her other works in the opinion of those who think as well as enjoy. Such attempts lie beyond the limits of weak contemporary praise, and to speak worthily of them is the heritage of a later generation.

APPENDIX.

JOHN PAYNE AND ARTHUR W. E. O'SHAUGHNESSY.



APPENDIX.

It would be strange if, in the time it must of necessity take to complete an essay on so wide a subject as that of the present volume, the weekly group of new books of verse had included nothing of equal value to much that is herein discussed. If it had been practicable to extend the scheme of my essay considerably at a late stage, I should have liked to examine at length the works of at least four gentlemen whose names have come before the public only of late—Mr. Payne, Mr. O'Shaughnessy, Dr. Hake, and Mr. K. R. Cooke; and it is likely that there is a good deal of verse issued by others that one might wish to search for promises of future work, if only one could read all that is put forth in the way of poetry. As matters stand, I shall not be able to do more than make a few remarks on the work of Mr. Payne and Mr. O'Shaughnessy, as being, of recent poetry, that which seems to hold both the greatest promise and the clearest evidence of attachment to the current poetic literature; and on this head I cannot do more than note that Mr. Payne's poetry seems to succeed especially to that of Mr. Morris, and Mr. O'Shaughnessy's to that of Mr. Swinburne. Mr. Cooke, with a true poetic gift, is altogether too immature in his verse for one to build firm hopes on him; while Dr. Hake, a genuine and very remarkable poet, seems like one who has somehow descended from a former generation of poets, ready accou-

tred from their traditions, and without any strong affinities with the present generations.

Of the four poems in Mr. Payne's first instalment of a work to be called *The House of Dreams*, that which stands first and gives a name to the volume is by far the least estimable, and serves best to define the gulph that exists between the author's present works and those of the incomparable 'dreamer of dreams' whose style and manner seem to have influenced him. Mr. Morris, as we have seen, dreams his dreams with a distinctly human solidity and interest, and with an absolute command over romantic method: Mr. Payne warns his readers at the outset that 'whoso is fain to enter in this shadow-land' of his must forget 'all the daylight ways of hand and brain;' and as regards the large bulk of his work the warning is timely and well-founded. In nearly all he has published one notes a lack of that material human interest essential for an enduring poetry: he takes pains to build, with oriental gorgeousness of fancy, airy visions that do not dwell in the mind, but pass away, leaving the vague sense of diffuse verbiage and phantasmic glare of undefined colour; and, although there is much sweet and tender landscape work, the sense of the dreamy and impalpable predominates in the long run over the sense of the real and tangible and healthful. These things are more markedly so in *The Masque of Shadows* than in any poem: it shows, as all Mr. Payne's poetry does, a quick and vivid imagination, but one that seems to be uncontrolled at present by any firmness of judgment sufficient to keep it in wholesome regions; the great part of these fanciful imaginings are of the bootless order;—they bear upon nothing beyond an abnormal love of the gorgeous and fantastic, and do not, except at rare intervals,

show sympathy with men and their passions and doings. *The Rime of Redemption* is a noteworthy exception to these general conditions of Mr. Payne's work: it is a real contribution to the poetry of the day, and has a very noble thought for basework. Written in the manner of *The Ancient Mariner*, it tells the tale of a knight whose 'conquering love' prevails to save the soul of

'the maid the past years laid
Upon his breast to sleep,
Long dead in sin, laid low within
The grave unblest and deep'—

and very finely carried out is the idea of his brooding over her untimely fate till he rises, determined to save her soul, even at the expense of his own, and meets her ghost in the moonlight, to speed forth on a weird ride in quest of 'Redemption.' This is the only one of these poems that falls compactly into a vital and inevitable form, sufficient to stamp it as a work of genius. The knight and the maid are hurried with splendid vigour through the four stages of their ghostly ride, halting at 'fairy-land,' purgatory, heaven and hell; at each of the first three the knight is offered admittance, but refuses any good for himself that cannot be shared by her; and when, at the fourth halting-place, he is given the alternative of going back without her or entering to burn for ever with her, he chooses hell. Of course the end is the disappearance of hell and the maid, and the apparition of a vision, whereby he 'knew his love prevail'd above judgment and destiny.' No space is lost here in bootless imaginings: all is occupied by the urgent and fiery action; and as a piece of vigorous impetuous ballad-verse it recalls the might of hand shown in *The Ancient Mariner* and something of the large rush of Bürger's *Lenore*. In its degree, the verse

'The cloudwrack grey did break away,
 Out shone the ghostly moon;
 Down slid the haze from off the ways
 Before her silver shoon'—

is graphic in the same great way as Coleridge's

'The sun's rim dips; the stars rush out;
 At one stride comes the dark'—

and the two following stanzas are simply magnificent:

'The wind screams past; they ride so fast,—
 Like troops of souls in pain
 The snowdrifts spin, but none may win
 To rest upon the twain.

So fast they ride, the blasts divide
 To let them hurry on;
 The wandering ghosts troop past in hosts
 Across the moonlight wan.'

In *The Building of the Dream* one has to note the same vagueness and diffuseness already spoken of: the poem is a great deal too long and visionary for any mood in these earnest days, save some listless, seaside, summer-noon mood; but the end is another admirably human exception to the poet's usual conditions: the hero, who had searched all his life for some means whereby to realise the dreams of his youth, and has discovered, by virtue of an old Greek recipe, the Earthly Paradise, finds the intense life of pleasure too much for his human weakness, and comes away from his ideal dream-queen to die among mere men. This is narrated with great pathos.

It is in a studied archaism of language and a love of old romance that one traces an analogy between Mr. Payne and Mr. Morris; but the wide difference indicated between Mr. Morris's romantic reality and Mr. Payne's romantic dreaminess is no wider than that between the language employed by the two poets. Mr. Morris's language is

natural and easy and direct, and above all things pure : Mr. Payne's strikes one as affected, and is certainly often involved and very far from pure ; for frequently, when studied imitation of Chaucer is most palpable, one meets with some word of an entirely modern order ; and indeed there is a wearisome frequency of long words, obsolete words, and unpleasantly quaint words.

Mr. Payne's book of sonnets, miscalled *Intaglios*, is disappointing. The sonnet set by way of inscription in front of the other book is very beautiful : it is quite as worthy of the name *Intaglio* as some of M. Gautier's pieces are to be called *Cameos*, and it gave hope that Mr. Payne might really write fine sonnets, notwithstanding the radical opposition between his romantic faculty and the faculty of sonnet-making. But there are not above two or three sonnets in the volume that have sufficient incisiveness, clearness of cut, and perfectness of finish to succeed by comparison to the title of *Intaglio*. In the inscription sonnet there is one fault,—the mistake of not making the sense pause at the end of the second quatrain, and of letting it pause with the first line of the sestet—so as to overbuild the quatrains and break the sestet. This mistake might have been accidental in the one instance ; but on turning to the volume of so-called *Intaglios*, we find the practice systematically adopted. This heresy is too important to be left unnoticed : it is simple ruin in a series of sonnets, though pardonable as an isolated variation. But beside this the sonnets have seldom any sufficient clearness and completeness of thought, or tenseness and crispness of phrase, for compositions in this form.

Mr. O'Shaughnessy's poetry is not really much more mature than Mr. Payne's is ; but while Mr. Payne's,

being for the most part shadowy and inexpressive of real life, shows its immaturity more particularly in style and method, Mr. O'Shaughnessy's, with a far less youthful style and method, shows youthfulness in expressing real life,—sometimes faintly enough, but at other times only too strongly. I say too strongly because the most vigorously expressed views of life to be found in this poet's book are restricted, and therefore relatively false if not positively false. There is not here any of the rampant viciousness we have seen in some recent poetry, but rather what should seem to be an accidental cynicism, sure to pass away with a few years of work as noble in manner as Mr. O'Shaughnessy promises to do. It seems almost a matter of course that a young poet of a highly ideal and sensuous tendency should feel something of a bitter isolation in these days of realistic and colourless outward existence; and therefore one would not find much fault with Mr. O'Shaughnessy for introducing himself to his readers as an exile walking among mere men, with the arrogant leniency set forth in such verses as these:—

'A common folk I walk among;
 I speak dull things in their own tongue:
 But all the while within I hear
 A song I do not sing for fear—
 How sweet, how different a thing!
 And when I come where none are near
 I open all my heart and sing. . . .
 I go with them; and in their sight
 I would not scorn their little light,
 Nor mock the things they hold divine;
 But when I kneel before the shrine
 Of some base deity of theirs,
 I pray all inwardly to mine,
 And send my soul up with my prayers.'

There is in such verses as these so much exquisiteness

of lyric instinct that 'common folk' can smile, and pardon the author for being a little unduly preoccupied with the knowledge that he has a poetic mission among prosaic people; and such 'common folk' as have common-sense do not expect him, in a first book, to be duly preoccupied with the knowledge that a poet is a poet, in the full sense, just in proportion as he can yield himself to the idealisation and beautifying of all that is dearest in the inmost heart of the average man and woman of his time. In like manner, it is not surprising that one who shows so delicate a sense of material beauty should have been overwhelmed by the consideration that so many of the traditional queens of beauty did very little good in the world, and a great deal of harm. Some day, perhaps, Mr. O'Shaughnessy will give us splendid poetry, showing a sense that woman's fairness is no such baneful thing when its influences are judged justly and widely; but at present we may accept the poems of the so-called *Epic of Women* with a keen sense of the extraordinary strength and directness they own as first lyric qualities, and without any fierce repugnance towards the cynical slur they cast on womankind. This collection of poems opens with a comical account of God's creation of woman,—beautifully told, however comical, and concluding with the explanatory generalisation:

'He feasted her with ease and idle food
Of gods, and taught her lusts to fill the whole
Of life; withal He gave her nothing good,
And left her as He made her—without soul.

And lo, when He had held her for a season
In His own pleasure-palaces above,
He gave her unto man; this is the reason
She is so fair to see, so false to love.'

And then we have put before us, in independent narrations, the evil doings of Aphrodite, Cleopatra, Salome, and Helen, and finally, in a very curious monologue, the wickedness and sudden death of some unspecified woman of comparative modernness. There is no organic connection between these poems beyond the dominant note of cynical censure; and there is no formal connection beyond the fact that all but two of them are written in similar quatrains to those just quoted. The best of them, *The Daughter of Herodias*, is in two admirable original metres; and the final poem, *A Troth for Eternity*, is in blank verse of a notably fine quality; but as a monologue, wherein the speaker indicates an action in several stages, it is decidedly objectionable on technical grounds: the whole or almost the whole of it is necessarily *thought* and not *spoken*, for throughout the speaker is analysing his relations with a woman present at the time, and reiterating to the reader a secret that he could not possibly divulge to *her*, namely that he means to stab her as soon as she gets to sleep. One cannot possibly regard the series as in any sense *An Epic of Women*, and it is therefore justifiable to select *The Daughter of Herodias*, and record one's opinion that here is a work of sufficient beauty and scope and truth to remove the author from the ranks of mere scholar-poets, and give him at once the unqualified standing of *poet*. It is a very fine idea here set forth, that the measure of Salome's accursedness is to be to all time in proportion to the divine beauty of the character overthrown by her wiles; and there is nothing of like breadth in any other of Mr. O'Shaughnessy's poems. The Baptist's solitary life in the desert, among the footprints of great elder prophets, is handled with much strength in

the earlier half of the poem: the two stanzas given below seem to me to be truly grand:

‘But he walked through the ancient wilderness.
O, there the prints of feet were numberless
And holy all about him! And quite plain
He saw each spot an angel silvershod
Had lit upon; where Jacob too had lain
The place seemed fresh,—and, bright and lately trod,
A long track showed where Enoch walked with God.
And often, while the sacred darkness trailed
Along the mountains smitted and unveiled
By rending lightnings,—over all the noise
Of thunders and the earth that quaked and bowed
From its foundations—he could hear the voice
Of great Elias prophesying loud
To Him whose face was covered by a cloud.’

And grander still are the passages telling how the unconscious natural things of the desert oppressed him with the sense of his human impurity:

‘Yea, all the dumb things and the creatures there
Were grand, and some way sanctified; most fair
The very lions stood, and had no shame
Before the angels; and what time were poured
The floods of the Lord’s anger forth, they came
Quite nigh the lightnings of the Mount and roared
Among the roaring thunders of the Lord:’—

until all this strange innocence forces him to purify himself by sharp discipline, and he feels impelled at length to

‘go forth straight
From God there in the desert, with the great
Unearthliness upon him, and adjure
The nations of the whole world with his voice.’

The exquisite sensuous beauty of Salome’s dance, as contrasted in the latter half of the poem with the adjuration of King Herod, is not less than masterly.

Of Mr. O’Shaughnessy’s smaller poems the three most pleasing are *A Whisper from the Grave*, *The Fountain of*

Tears, and *The Spectre of the Past* : these three are perfectly clear in their pathetic meaning, and notably excellent in metric and rhythmic qualities. Indeed, as regards the invention and use of metres the author is particularly happy. Those of his own originating are at the same time simple, musical, and individual; and it is not very often that metric ease and beauty are sacrificed to crotchets of diction and roughness of cadence throughout his book. The main fault one has to find in the miscellaneous poems is a vagueness, not of form, but of thought or sentiment: the poet is frequently obscure; and the worst of it is that those poems which demand most pains to get to the centre of are least worth the pains. To say that Mr. O'Shaughnessy's style is already absolutely individual or by any means perfect would be rash; but that it holds sufficient good qualities and few enough bad qualities to give sure token that he can, with earnest work, get himself a complete and self-sufficient manner, one need not hesitate to affirm; and it seems probable that, as years go on, he will have that to tell to men which will be well worth the garment of a perfect poetic manner of speech.

THE END.

LONDON:

ROBSON AND SONS, PRINTERS, FANCY ROAD, E.W.



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

NO PHONE RENEWALS

REC'D LD-URL
JAN 4 1986
FEB 08 1986

REC'D LD-URL

LD
URL MAY 18 1991

REC'D LD-URL
JUN 24 1995

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A A

001 397 900

0

